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INDIA**

**M.A. ANSARI**

**MUSHIRUL HASAN**



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**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION  
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*To the memory*

*of my brother*

*NAJMUL HASAN*





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Professor Hasan has edited *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (1993) *India's Colonial Encounter: Essays in Honour of Eric Stokes* (1993); *Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad* (1992); *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India* (2nd rev. edn., 1985).





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## Acknowledgement

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I hope Barbara, Shaaz and Shehzad would derive some comfort from the fact that this book is dedicated to the loving memory of Sonny (Najmul Hasan) who is, alas, no more, though his memory will always remain part of us.

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## Introduction

ON 14 May 1936 Asaf Ali suggested to Gandhi that an appropriate memorial be raised in memory of Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari who dedicated his life to the cause of the Indian nationalist movement. His idea was to associate Ansari's name with rural medical aid all over India in the form of 'Ansari Medical Corps' or 'Ansari Travelling Dispensary'.<sup>1</sup> But neither then nor later did such suggestions receive consideration. The 'Ansari Road' in Delhi is the only reminder of Ansari's long-standing association with the city as a physician-surgeon, political activist and educationist. Close to it, is now the dilapidated house of Ansari—Dar-us-Salam—once the venue of Congress meetings and the focal point of much political activity in the capital of British India. But not many in the neighbourhood are familiar with its significance or have heard of its previous occupant.

Sometime in 1934-35, Mohammad Mujeeb, then a teacher at the Jamia Millia Islamia, undertook to write Ansari's biography with the aid of a rich collection of papers which included letters, press clippings, pamphlets and books. But the biography was never written.<sup>2</sup> The papers were promptly transferred to a basement in the Jamia Library, and were retrieved in the early 1960s. In the meantime, part of the collection, especially Ansari's correspondence from 1912 to 1925, was destroyed. Today, little is known of Ansari in the Jamia—an institution he nursed from the time of its inception in October 1920.

Historians in the subcontinent have also ignored Ansari's active political life which spanned over two decades of a tumultuous phase in India's struggle for liberation from colonial domination. It is easy to explain this omission in Pakistan, where scholars are hard-pressed to discern a separatist strain in Ansari's political concerns which were steeped in the essentially secular, democratic ethos of the nationalist struggle. As one wedded to the Congress ideals in the tradition of many of his predecessors and contemporaries—Badrudin Tyabji, R.M. Sayani, Hasrat Mohani, the Raja of Mahmudabad, Mazharul Haq, Umar Subhani, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Ali Imam, Professor Abdul Bari, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Abdul Majid Khwaja, Mujibur Rahman, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Syed Mahmud, Asaf Ali and Tassaduq Ahmad Khan Sherwani—he would have poured scorn on the idea of a separate Pakistan as unequivocally as he opposed the potentially divisive tendencies during his lifetime. The two-nation theory would have been as much an anathema to him as was the notion of granting separate electorates and communal representation to the minorities. He envisaged a democratic, secular and federal polity for the future India of his dream. His vision in this respect was similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi and his political heir, Jawaharlal Nehru. Ansari was neither a theorist nor a creative thinker, but he certainly had a vision of a just society, a civilized and harmonious whole, a society in which there would be no friction on account of caste, regional, linguistic and religious diversities. "I consider the brotherhood of man as the only tie", he declared, "and partition based on race or religion are, to my mind, artificial and arbitrary."

Ansari is not the only leader to escape attention in India. After independence, there has been a stream of biographical



literature on Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who played so central a part in the shaping of modern India. Scholarly interest has also extended to such other leaders who possessed a distinct cultural, religious, or regional identity and have, therefore, inspired the particularist tendencies of certain castes, communities and regions. This is true of C.R. Das and S.C. Bose in Bengal, C. Rajagopalachari in Tamil Nadu, Madan Mohan Malaviya in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab—all identified with a particular region where they are eulogized and placed in the category of 'heroes'. On the other hand, leaders bearing no specific affinity to a region or a religious group have not received much notice. Ansari is among them. Cut off from his home state Uttar Pradesh, Ansari chose to live in Delhi in a composite cultural environment and followed a political course which did not reflect the interests and aspirations of any particular region or community. In consequence, his role is not only obscure but he also appears much less charismatic and influential than many of his contemporaries.

Another reason for ignoring the Congress Muslims must be located in the popular perception of their supposed failure to counter the two-nation theory, their inability to present a viable enough alternative to the Muslim League and to rally their community around the Congress banner. "The collapse and elimination of the Nationalist Muslims as a group," wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, "forms a pitiful story."<sup>3</sup> Even if we accept this judgement, a historian is still called upon to analyse the process through which the Congress Muslims were marginalized and the reasons why they ceased to be an effective force in Indian politics. To uncover this aspect is an important enough subject for investigation, for 'success' stories alone do not form the core of a historian's concern. As an important

component of the nationalist stream and as representative of a particular ideological strand, the emergence of the Congress Muslim group and their subsequent 'decline' and 'disintegration' deserves critical appraisal in order to understand certain vital dimensions of the nationalist and separatist political processes.

The present work attempts to focus on the political career of one such person—Ansari—who put forward the point of view of the Congress Muslims with clarity, consistency and conviction and furthered an ideological position which he and his band of followers adhered to with remarkable tenacity. He succeeded—where others failed—in reconciling his community's concerns with what he perceived as the nation's interests and remained true to all that Indian nationalism stood for. Above all, he articulated a line of action which inspired many of his comrades to stay clear of communal proclivities and left behind a legacy and a tradition which was pursued relentlessly by many of those associated with the All-India Nationalist Muslim Party, an organization he founded in July 1929. One of the purposes of this book is to uncover this essential but neglected aspect of India's nationalist history.

It is, indeed, tempting to exaggerate the importance of such a leader and to extol his virtues. This study, however, is not meant to serve that purpose. The aim throughout has been to reveal Ansari as what he undoubtedly was—one of the most important figures in Indian politics—to delineate his principal political interests, to explore his ideological predilections and to draw a portrait that captures his flaws as well as his strong points, his failures as well as his successes. Wherever possible, the endeavour has been to analyse his responses and attitudes in the larger historical context provided by colonial rule in India. Various influences on the style and content of his



politics have been alluded to, if not always given their full historical weight. In so doing, I hope not only to throw light on certain important and unstudied dimensions of modern Indian history, but also to suggest that the role of the Congress Muslims in general provides a useful entree for understanding many facets of nationalism and communalism in India.

### NOTES

1. Asaf Ali to Gandhi, 14 May 1936, F. No. G-21, 1936, All India Congress Committee Papers (AICC), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).
2. Mujeeb noted in his preliminary draft of Ansari's unfinished biography that he was 'quite lost' because Ansari had little time to spare for interviews. He wrote a small section of chapter one—'The Lights and Shades'—but was unable to complete it. Draft, Mujeeb Collection, Dr Zakir Husain Library, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI).
3. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography: With musings on Recent Events in India* (London, 1936), p. 139.

## Ghazipur to Delhi

FOUNDED in 1330, Ghazipur gained much importance in the sixteenth century as a seat of government and as capital of a *sarkar* in the *suba* of Allahabad. In December 1763, the East India Company acquired control of Ghazipur with the Collector of Banaras as its administrator. This arrangement continued until 1818 when Ghazipur was constituted as a district.

In the revolt of 1857 Ghazipur figured prominently when the bulk of the people, led by some zamindars who were aggrieved at their ejection by auction-purchasers, joined in the massive upsurge and pillaged government offices and treasury. Muslims of Ghazipur figured prominently in the revolt. It was strange that this was so, for they formed just over 9 per cent of the population and were unevenly distributed in four *tahsils*—Ghazipur; Zamaniah, which derives its name from Ali Quli Khan Khan Zaman, who expelled the Afghans from Ghazipur in 1560 and was Governor of Jaunpur in the reign of Akbar (1556-1605); Muhammadabad, an old Muslim settlement dating from the days of the Lodi Sultans (1451-1526) and Saidpur. Most Muslims in these areas were *Julahas* or weavers, supporting themselves by weaving either in their own villages or in the mills of Calcutta, Kanpur and Bombay where they went to work for short periods. The *District Gazetteer* described them as ‘the most bigoted of all Mussalmans’ and as ‘a turbulent and lawless race’, an assessment formed in the

aftermath of the 1857 revolt and quite obviously influenced by their active participation in the revolt.

A family of great eminence in Ghazipur district was that of the Ansaris, but they preferred not to use the prefix in order to distinguish themselves from the *Julahas*, who also claimed to be the descendants of those *Ansars* (aiders) of Medina who rendered assistance to Prophet Mohammad when he migrated (*hijrat*) from Mecca. The Ansaris, in general, traced their descent from Abu Ayyub Ansari (d. 672), a close companion of the Prophet, his host at Medina, a warrior and a venture-some conqueror who, when fighting across the Bosphorus at the age of ninety or more, was killed and had requested to be buried in Constantinople. Direct descent was through the three sons of Khwaja Hamiduddin, who came from Arabia in the fourteenth century and settled in Shiraz from where his sons migrated to Delhi. One of them was appointed *Qazi* by Mohammad bin Tughlaq (1325-51) and was succeeded by his nephew who founded Yusufpur. The office of *Qazi* continued to be held by members of the family even after the British acquired control of the area and introduced basic changes in the judicial structure which, as in the case of Bengal, displaced many Muslims from the judicial department and added to their impoverishment. Some members of the Ansari family were also employed in government service which enabled them to purchase property in and around Ghazipur. There were others, who either acquired land by purchasing the estates of the old families, brought to ruin by the mismanagement or by the unsympathetic revenue administrators, or retained their ancestral lands, as in the case of Bhitri which was given to the Ansaris by the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. The *District Gazetteer* noted: "There are numerous members of the family and they hold a fair amount of land in the neighbourhood,



including Yusufpur itself, which is 327 acres in extent and is assessed at Rs. 712, the tenure being *bighadam*.”

With Mukhtar Ahmed (hereafter referred to as Ansari), the youngest of the four sons of Haji Abdul Rahman, the Ansaris came into prominence: they emerged from the position of an old Ghazipur family into national eminence. From the early 1920s, some of his close relatives—Aziz Ansari (1889-1985), Faridul Haq Ansari (1895-1966) and Shaukatullah Ansari (1908-1972)—played an important part in political affairs. None succeeded in scaling the heights achieved by their political mentor but they consistently championed his secular ideals and remained loyal to the nationalist movement. Aziz joined the Indian medical mission to Constantinople and went to jail during both the non-cooperation and the civil disobedience agitations; Farid was member of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) from 1927 to 1948, secretary of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee in 1929-30 and one of the founders of the Congress Socialist Party; Shaukatullah, a nephew of Ansari and married to his adopted daughter, Zohra (1913-1989), floated various organizations, especially, in the mid-1940s, in support of the Congress. Notable amongst them were the Azad Muslim Board and the All-India Muslim Majlis. In 1940 he was elected General-Secretary of the All-India Azad Muslim Conference and in 1944, he published a powerful indictment of the two-nation theory. “Partition”, he concluded, “would throw India back to something like the state she was in after the Mughal Empire had collapsed and before the British Raj replaced it. For, once the frame of unity was broken, once the process of disruption had begun, it would not be likely to stop at the separation of a Moslem State or States from Hindu India.”<sup>1</sup>



Born on 25 December 1880 in Yusufpur, Ansari had a quiet but deep pride in his ancestry. It pleased him to think that his roots lay deep in the soil of Arabia and that he belonged to a distinguished family with branches in different parts of the country. Mohammad Mujeeb (1902-1985), then a teacher at the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, records an interview in which he quotes Ansari as saying: "My family originates from the Ansaris." But then he stopped, then laughed. "Why should one imagine that Ansaris are particularly few. There are as many as have been destined to be."<sup>2</sup>

The Ansaris enjoyed considerable respect in their area, though they were not men of wealth or influence as their fortunes were substantially reduced in the second-half of the nineteenth century. They held on to their small landholdings but were unable to make much out of them. Forced by circumstances they took to government service, a distasteful choice for those who were not yet reconciled to the reality of British rule in India.

Ansari's father—Abdul Rahman—was an *Amin* at Rasara in Ballia district. His fame in the region rested on the loyal service he rendered to the British in the 1857 revolt, for which he received a small estate near Yusufpur. He was granted exemption from the Arms Act and eventually prospered in a modest way.

Rahman, a devout Muslim who went on the arduous pilgrimage (*Haj*) to Mecca, did not leave behind any great fortune for his sons to inherit, a fact which explains why soon after his death in 1902 the male members of the family moved out of Ghazipur in search of a career. But he took a close and guiding interest in his sons' education. This was a great asset. Few middle class families, particularly in eastern U.P., paid as much attention to the education of their children as Rahman did.

Abdul Wahhab (d. 1946), the eldest son, was educated in the Islamic branches of learning, specializing in the *Yunani* system of medicine at the renowned Tibbia school in Delhi, run by *Haziq-ul-Mulk* Hakim Abdul Majid Khan (d. 1901). He also went to the *Dar-al-alum* at Deoband, the famous religious seminary born in the throes of the 1857 revolt and was a *murid* of its founder, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1828-1905). In his days, his intellect was feared, his character praised and his almost legendary reputation as Hakim *Nabina* (for he was blind) spread to different parts of the country. He practised in Hyderabad, Poona, Bombay and Delhi, where Khwaja Hasan Nizami (1878-1957) called him *Luqman-ul-Mulk*. Mujeeb went to his house on the western side of the historic Juma Masjid area and found that he had 'an old, established system of preparing medicaments for the needs of the poor as well as the rich.'

Abdur Razzaq (1868-1930) was also a renowned Hakim, though he never attained the reputation of his elder brother. He spent many years in the Nizam's court at Hyderabad and was primarily responsible for drawing several members of his family to the Deccan. "We soon began to practise apart", stated Razzaq, "and lived in separate houses. We both had considerable success there and got large fees." Although both the brothers invited the wrath of the Nizam for their part in the perpetual court intrigues and were consequently exiled from Hyderabad, they left an indelible mark on the city's social and cultural life. Decades after their forced exile, their family members continued to enjoy the patronage of several nobles who cherished their association with the two eminent hakims.

Apart from their common professional interests, Wahhab and Razzaq were equal in their devotion to the *ulama* of Deoband. Wahhab was a *murid* of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi;



Razzaq of Mahmud Hasan (1851-1920), Principal of the *Dar-al-ulum*.

These family connections with Muslim divines proved advantageous when they were pressed into service to provide depth to the massive Khilafat agitation in India. Razzaq, influenced by Mahmud Hasan, was drawn into the 'Silk Letter Conspiracy'. Ansari, also a *murid* of the renowned Deoband *alim* and of Hafiz Muhammad Ali of Gorakhpur, acted as an effective link between the *ulama* and the western-educated Muslims and greatly helped to strengthen their alliance in 1919-1922. His wife, on the other hand, was a *murid* of Hafiz Ahmad Khan, *Mohtasim* of Deoband, and corresponded with him to secure the release of Mahmud Hasan, interned in Malta for his part in the 'Silk Letter Conspiracy'. When Ansari went to Edinburgh for higher studies, he took with him two firmly established family traditions: a vocational commitment to medicine and a religious commitment to the *ulama* of Deoband.

In spite of their brief forays into the political arena, Wahhab and Razzaq lived in a world divorced from politics. Both were deeply steeped in the Islamic heritage, frequenting *dargahs* of *pirs* and *madrasas* of many a well-known *alim* to seek enlightenment, spiritual solace and guidance. Next to this, *hikmat* remained their main concern. Their astonishing success in the practice of *Yunani tibb* was matched only by the almost legendary popularity of Hakim Ajmal Khan (1863-1927), whose house and hospital were filled day by day with the sick and dying and who would minister to them, taking no fees from the poor of Delhi. Exceedingly generous, they earned vast sums of money and spent most of it on their family. Abdur Razzaq supported Ansari and his cousin Mohammad Asghar while they were in London, and later helped his brother in setting up his practice in Delhi.

The younger brothers—Mohammad Raza (d. 1935) and Ansari—were cast in a different mould. This had much to do with their education in schools and colleges organized on Western lines, a fact which helped them to pursue careers different from their relations. While many students of their background preferred the Aligarh College, Rahman did not disdain to send his children to the Muir Central College at Allahabad, established in 1872 by private subscription of wealthy landowners, bankers and pleaders of the city. Here Ansari studied English, Mathematics, Deductive Logic, Trigonometry and Geometrical and Conic Sections, Elementary Physics and Chemistry. The education imparted at the college was valuable. In fact, it was this early association with Hindus and the composite environment of life in Allahabad that shaped Ansari's attitude to Hindus in particular and the communal problem in general.

The choice of the college was dictated in part because it was one of the premier educational institutions in northern India and in part because the mother who doted upon Ansari wanted him to remain close to the family in Ghazipur. For the same reason, when Razzaq decided to move with his mother to Hyderabad in 1898, Ansari had no choice but to accompany them. There is little doubt that during his childhood and early youth, he was the focus of a comfortable and loving family. In the future, the quite solidity of the family home was to provide a necessary haven to which he could retreat from the rigours of a hectic political life.

Ansari passed his intermediate examination from the Muir College in 1896. He then went up to Nizam College, an institution aided by its founder-patron, the Nizam. Soon after, he was married to Shamsunnisa (d. 1938). She was a pliant wife and a good housekeeper. Visitors to Ansari's household,



as Halide Edib (1884-1964), the Turkish author, remembered her as 'very pious, very charitable.'<sup>3</sup> What is perhaps not known is that the Begum did much public work, was associated with the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*, leading the appeal for moral and financial support along with the mother of the Ali Brothers and the wife of Mohamed Ali (1878-1931), headed the Delhi branch of the Women's Khilafat Committee and attended the Congress sessions regularly; the only one she missed was the one at Belgaum (1925) owing to a motor accident. Confined as she was to the domestic role expected of a woman of her time and station, Shamsunnisa found an outlet for her interests and energy in the political career of her husband.

Ansari graduated from the Nizam College in 1900. He did not do well in his examinations but impressed his teachers with his diligence and earnestness. His potential was recognized and, in 1899, he received the state scholarship to study medicine in Great Britain. This was a dream come true, for men of Ansari's background yearned for an opportunity to obtain a degree from a British university which was a valuable asset and a passport to joining the 'heaven born'.

At the age of twenty-one, Ansari sailed for London, being the first member of the family to cross the seas; he was followed by a cousin, Mohammad Asghar, who studied law in London. Reporting himself to the educational adviser in London at 21, Cromwell Road and spending a couple of weeks in the accommodation provided for new arrivals, Ansari went to Edinburgh to join the Medical College. By sheer talent and a capacity for prolonged and concentrated work, he secured the degree of Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery in 1908. Soon after, he moved to London to serve as resident medical officer in the Charing Cross Hospital and as clinical

assistant at the Lock Hospital. He was the first Indian to achieve such a distinction. This caused quite a furore in the local Press. An evening newspaper published a leading story entitled 'Grave Injustice to British Doctors' with unmistakable racist overtones. But the Governing Council of the Charing Cross Hospital stoutly defended Ansari's appointment.

This incident gained widespread publicity. It was a matter of pride for many Indians that one of them had established his professional competence and ability in the face of a hostile and racially arrogant section of the British Press. Among Muslims, in particular, he became known as among the few in the community who opted for the 'modern method' as opposed to the more commonly practised *Yunani tibb*. There are many others now who have done the same, but Ansari was the first to lead the way.

The youngman's stay in Britain, which lasted from 1901 to 1910, is the least known period of his life. Not a single letter from these years survives, either written or received by Ansari, and it is only from isolated comments contained in a few contemporary accounts that one can tentatively reconstruct in a very limited way the society in which he lived. We know, for instance, that he did, indeed, work hard, but also found time to be sociable to act in plays and to make some lively and intelligent friends. Although an entertaining and at times a fascinating companion when he was in the right mood, with a great store of anecdotes and Urdu *ghazals* on which to draw, he was not by nature very gregarious or sociable. Even in later years he did not easily admit those he met to his confidence or allow them to penetrate the warmth and humanity which lay behind his formidable defences.

Most people who met Ansari in London found him relaxed by temperament, highly cultivated and generous. According to



Mujeeb's description in his unfinished biography, Ansari was 'a distinctive figure of average height, broad, pleasing looks, openness, of a voice somewhat musical, emotions gushing and effusive, but what struck people at once were his attractive eyes, his pompous moustache and profusive eye-brows'. He exuded the charm which swiftly won friends. Most of the friendships he formed in London lasted until his death; many were to play significant parts in his professional or political life. There was Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), who took to him at once and described meeting 'a smart and clever young man with a record of brilliant academic achievement behind him'.<sup>4</sup> Their association developed into a lifelong friendship, which was cemented by a shared political outlook. It was to him and his father that Ansari most readily confided his plans and his feelings, and it was to their home in Allahabad that he liked best to go when he had a holiday. It was a relationship so central to Ansari's life and which he took so much for granted, that he never felt the need to comment on it.

There was also Ajmal Khan, the scion of a family of physicians who had long served the Mughal court and, after their decline, the courts of regional princes. The two first met in London and found each other's company congenial; Ansari had the ability to spark off enthusiasm among those he met. Their friendship ripened after Ansari's return to India when they worked together in the Rowlatt *satyagraha*. There were few secrets between these two men through the long unbroken years of friendship and few griefs in which they could not solace each other.

Another person of vigorous and independent mind Ansari met in London was Mohammad Iqbal (1876-1938). Iqbal was already well known through his Urdu poetry. In 1905 Iqbal left for Europe. He studied at Trinity Collge, Cambridge, read

German at Heidelberg and submitted his doctorate dissertation at the University of Munich. Atiya Begum Fyzee, who belonged to an aristocratic family of Bombay and was a cousin of Sir Akbar Hydari (1869-1942), described the young brilliant student of those days; she met Iqbal first in London and later in Germany where he went in June 1907. She has recorded the details of a party at her house on 23 June 1907. "Dr Ansari", she noted, "entertained us with songs, Lord Sinha's daughters ...with music, and Iqbal with extempore compositions of clever and witty verses referring to almost every important guest present by making exaggerated remarks about their peculiarities, sending us all into roars of laughter."<sup>5</sup> A brief reference to a meeting with Ansari is also available in the account of Atiya's sister-in-law, Rufiah Sultan Nazli Begum.<sup>6</sup>

Such social gatherings were frequently organized to recreate the north Indian culture of the elite in an alien cultural milieu and were often attended by British civil servants and educationists who had served in India. Thus we have references to Ansari, Mohamed Ali and Fazl-i-Husain (1877-1936) attending parties hosted by the families of Theodore Beck (1859-1899), the Principal of the Aligarh College in Syed Ahmad Khan's (1817-1898) lifetime, and T.W. Arnold (b. 1864), who joined the institution in 1888 and authored several works on Islam and the history of Muslims. On 21 September 1898 Ansari was in the company of Mohamed Ali and Fazl-i-Husain at 82, Brondesbury Villas in Kilburn, the home of Miss Beck. "We passed an exceedingly pleasant evening", recorded Fazl-i-Husain in his diary, "talked literature, philosophy, politics, and what not."<sup>7</sup>

In the course of such social interaction people came to share each other's impressions and experiences. Their meetings



often generated much lively discussions, providing clues to their political predilections. But there is no evidence to indicate Ansari's involvement in any political debate or his association with any Indian student group, such as the Majlis in Cambridge, the Oxford Islamic Society, or the *Anjuman-i-Islamia*, later called the Pan-Islamic Society. Some of his contemporaries—Abdul Majid Khwaja (1885-1962), Haroon Khan Sherwani (1891-1980) and Syed Mahmud (1889-1971)—were deeply influenced by the writings of W.S. Blunt (1840-1922) and Professor E.G. Browne (1862-1926) of Cambridge, and were active in organizing Muslim students in Britain in support of pan-Islamism and the nationalist movements in West Asia. Available evidence does not disclose whether Ansari made the acquaintance of either of them at this time, though it is certain that during his stay in London he devoted very little thought to politics, Indian or other. Indeed it was not until the political ferment in his community towards the end of 1911 and, more particularly, until the outbreak of the Turko-Italian War, that he began to take an interest in public affairs.

Ansari returned to India in 1910 and was offered the principalship of the Lahore Medical College. But he was unable to accept the offer, because the terms of the scholarship on which he went to Edinburgh stipulated that he would serve Hyderabad State for some years. He waited in vain for six months to be placed in one of the medical institutions. He then toyed with the idea of moving to Calcutta, but two of his patrons—the Raja of Mahmudabad (1879-1931) and Ali Iman (1869-1932), a lawyer and member of the Governor General's Council at the time—thought otherwise. They saw a bright future for the young, brilliant doctor in Delhi, the new capital of British India, and advised him accordingly. Ansari agreed.



Delhi was not only the Imperial capital but also one of the main centres of the Urdu-speaking world, the home of Urdu prose and poetry; the home of Mir Taqi Mir (1733-1814) and Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869). In Ansari's own words, it was the 'cradle of Islamic civilization in India' and 'the city of Muslim memories.' "Time has not yet effaced the landmarks of Islam in the history of this country", he observed, "nor has the dust of centuries buried the footprints of our ancestors."<sup>8</sup> The decision to settle in Delhi was final. From that moment Ansari planned his life with a method rare among young men and adhered to his own rules with inflexible self-discipline. He had every reason to feel satisfied and some excuse for being self-satisfied. He had been successful and popular at the medical schools in London and faced the future with a confident belief in his ability to make the most of it.

Ansari's clinic was for several years housed in a portion of the Fatehpuri mosque in the old city, a mosque sold by the British to a Hindu banker after the 1857 revolt and returned to the Muslims by the Viceroy, Lytton (1831-1891). Here and later in Daryaganj he continued to practise and was perhaps among the few famous doctors of India. Many leading Congressmen, princes, rajas and nawabs were among his patients and also the poor. There were certain hours he gave to the poor daily, no matter what profit he could have made from those hours. The cases were almost all non-Muslim; the needy Muslims were generally treated free directly or through relatives.

Ansari's private house—*Behisht* (Paradise)—was by the old city walls, near the Mori Gate. It was in this house that C.F. Andrews and Mohamed Ali lectured on the sufferings of Indians in South Africa. The distinguished English novelist

E.M. Forster (1879-1970) and his companion Syed Ross Masud (1889-1937) stayed at the *Behisht* during their visit in late October 1912. Forster described his host as “a most charming Doctor”, and was impressed with his hospitality.<sup>9</sup>

The *Behisht* was thronged by unexplained visitors—sitting cross-legged on the beds or on the luggage. There seemed to be no set meal times, but whenever Forster crossed the threshold, tea and poached eggs would appear and Ansari’s wife, who observed *purdah*, would send cigarettes, betel nut and *itr* (scent).<sup>10</sup> “I am in the middle of a very queer life”, he wrote to a friend on 2 November 1912, “whether typically Oriental, I have no means of knowing, but it isn’t English.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1928 Ansari set up his clinic within the walled city in Daryaganj which remained a sparsely-built up area until 1908, when the British troops stationed there, were evacuated to the new cantonment on the Ridge. Gradually, however, some new houses were constructed by some successful lawyers and doctors. Ansari moved into one of them. Apart from the fact that for some years he shared with Dr H.C. Sen the distinction of being the only Indian in Delhi to own motor cars, he soon became the proud owner of an elegant octagonal building, overlooking a square lawn, bought from Lala Sultan Singh at the rather high price of Rs. 50,000. It was aptly called the *Dar-us-Salam*, abode of peace. In the early 1930s, it was the venue of many important meetings and conferences: a counterpart of Motilal Nehru’s (1861-1931) Allahabad residence, Anand Bhawan. Halide Edib stayed in *Dar-us-Salam* for two months in 1935 and described it as “an historical place where the ancient, the medieval, and the modern came together: the ideas and aspirations of divergent personalities meet, coalesce, and the personalities disperse to set in motion new trends elsewhere.” “In the free India of the future”, she prophesied,



“that house will be one of the principal landmarks in its marking.”<sup>12</sup>

Ansari's niece and adopted daughter, Zohra, also lived in *Dar-us-Salam*. “Her life,” according to the Turkish author, “seemed to be an Indian version of my life of thirty-five years ago in Turkey. She was too individualistic to fit into a fixed group whether inside or outside of *Purdah*.”<sup>13</sup> She described Zohra's interest in history and literature:

She knew her country's history exceedingly well...she did not feel Muslims to be an alien race, a minority grafted on Indian soil, and doomed to remain as such. She was Indian to the core. Ashoka was part of her past history just as much as Humayun... She both humanized and dramatized for me the great monumental edifices which would otherwise have been only heaps of stones more or less artistically arranged. She knew all the legends around the lives of those who had lived in those ruins.<sup>14</sup>

It has been necessary to dwell in some detail upon these impressions, because they reveal Ansari's profound influence on the young Zohra who continued the legacy of her father's broadmindedness and catholic outlook. What is however not brought out, though Edib hints at this in her account, is that children were a constant pleasure and interest to Ansari and the most delightful aspects of his character were aroused by parenthood. He reserved his affection and care for Zohra, his letters to her sparkling with tenderness, humour and affection. In her years spent at *Dar-us-Salam* Zohra proved to be a woman of strong character and intelligence who understood her father as no one else did; and in return Ansari confided



everything to her, as he did to no one else, not even his wife. He found in Zohra the intellectual companionship and supportive admiration he needed.

## NOTES

1. Shaukatullah Ansari, *Pakistan: The Problem of India* (Lahore, 1944), p. 103.
2. Draft note, Mujeeb Collection, JMI; M. Mujeeb, 'Dr Ansari: Chand Yaaden-baaten', *Aaj Kal* (Delhi), Ansari Number, January 1981, pp. 12-13.
3. Halide Edib, *Inside India* (London, 1936), p. 31; Zohra Ansari, 'Shamsunnisa aur Dr Ansari', *Aaj Kal*, January 1981, p. 14.
4. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 17.
5. Atiya Fyzee, *Iqbal* (Bombay, 1947).
6. Nazli Begum of Jangira, *Sair-i-Europe* (Lahore, n.d.), p. 26.
7. MSS. EUR. E. 352 (2), Fazl-i-Husain Papers, IOL.
8. Speech at the All-India Muslim League Session, Delhi, 1918, Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress: Select Correspondence of Dr. M.A. Ansari, 1912-1935* (Delhi, 1979), p. 264.
9. To Mary Aylward, 30 October 1912, Mary Lago and P.N. Furbank (eds.), *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster, 1879-1920* (London, 1983), vol. I, p. 141.
10. To Laury Mary Forster, 31 October 1912; *ibid.*, p. 144.
11. P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life: The Growth of the Novelist 1879-1914* (London, 1978), p. 228.
12. Edib, *Inside India*, p. 27.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
14. *Ibid.*

## The Political Milieu, 1910-1917

THE India to which Ansari came in 1912, at the age of thirty-two, was a land of relative tranquility. The flames which had fired the *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal had been extinguished with the annulment of Bengal's partition in 1911, and for the time being, a major irritant in government's relationship with the Indian National Congress was removed. The 'moderates', epitomized by men like G.K. Gokhale (1866-1915), Pherozeshah Mehta (1848-1915) and Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925), now came to dominate the Congress affairs after having been eclipsed by the rapid rise of the extremist nationalists in Maharashtra, Bengal and the Punjab. The 'extremists', on the other hand, were scattered by British repression, but their hopes of an ultimate victory were kept alive by the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 and by another inspiring example, that of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) who led successful passive resistance struggles in South Africa between 1906 and 1914. The defeat of the Russian Army and Navy at the hands of a much smaller Asian country than India led the 'extremists' and their revolutionary allies to believe that if Japan could thwart an occidental giant like Russia, then India, a much larger country, could do the same to an insular power like Britain. This thinking gave impetus to the demand for *Swaraj* which became the battle-cry for the Indian nationalists. Such sentiments were echoed in different parts of the country, including Delhi which became the Imperial capital on 1 October 1912.

Delhi remained a political backwater until February 1917 when a branch of the Home Rule League was opened, a fact alluded to by Ansari in his evidence before the Hunter Commission. This marked “the entry of prominent local men”, as the Chief Commissioner of Delhi put it, “into the all-India political arena”, and led to a sudden flurry of political activity: the Indraprastha Sewak Mandli was formed in May 1917 in response to Annie Besant’s (1847-1933) advocacy of Boy Scouts’ Organization and Volunteer Corps—with Ansari, Ajmal Khan and Asaf Ali (1888-1953) on the management committee—was raised in early 1918. Contemporaries noticed the consequent heightening of political consciousness, manifested in anti-government rumblings of these organizations and suggested the not so unfamiliar remedy of educating the ‘public mind on Imperial lines’.

Ansari, already known for his good work as leader of the Indian medical mission to Constantinople, was a key figure in Delhi’s Home Rule movement. As its President he organized an intermittent but comprehensive scheme of propaganda, declared that liberty of thought and speech was the birthright of every citizen and urged the people to condemn the arrest of Annie Besant. “It is a matter which concerns not simply an individual community or province, but is an all-India question and touches the liberty and the rights of every Indian. Hence silence at a time like this is cowardly and disloyal to one’s own people and to one’s self.”<sup>1</sup>

Apart from local men like Asaf Ali, Shiv Narain Haksar, Abdur Rahman (b. 1888), R.S. Piyare Lal and Abdul Aziz (b. 1907), Ansari who already had the nucleus of a small political following, persuaded a number of his younger Muslim friends from UP to attend meetings of the League, hosted their visits to Delhi and initiated them into the Home Rule crusade.



Among those he influenced most was Khaliquzzaman (1889-1973), an Aligarh graduate and Tassaduq Ahmad Khan Sherwani (1889-1935), a contemporary of Jawaharlal at Cambridge who emerged as Ansari's principal lieutenant in subsequent political struggles. The identification of such men threatened to disturb the placid life of Delhi and involve its citizens in an agitation of serious proportions.

In its historial sequence, the Home Rule agitation raised the general level of political consciousness, served as an instrument of mass mobilization and brought to the fore the organizing and leadership qualities of several fresh recruits to the nationalist movement. Among them were Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Shankarlal Banker and Umar Subhani (d. 1926) in Bombay; Jawaharlal, Harkaran Nath Misra (d. 1890), Khaliquzzaman, Khwaja and Sherwani in UP; Ansari, Ajmal Khan and Asaf Ali in Delhi. Most of them were to occupy a prominent position in the shaping of the country's destiny, but gained their first experience of agitational politics during the Home Rule campaign. Jawaharlal recalled how the atmosphere became electric in those days with the younger men expecting 'big things to happen in the near future and how Annie Besant's internment added to the excitement of the intelligentsia and vitalized the Home Rule movement all over the country.

The Leagues attracted the old 'Extremists' who had been kept out of the Congress since 1907, as well as large numbers of newcomers from the middle classes.<sup>2</sup> The *New Era*, an organ of the politically radical Muslim group, noticed how Annie Besant's incarceration 'unwittingly accomplished the purpose of an organized agitation and propaganda in a single day', led to 'a fresh stirring in public life' and a 'stiffening of public resolve.'<sup>3</sup> Ansari, too, referred to its impact in Delhi,

where 'the recent events have produced a great deal of feeling and people who were not Home Rule Leaguers have either joined the League or are thinking of joining it soon. Even some of the most conservative people have changed their views [and], have come to look upon the actions of some of the local governments as highly unconstitutional and unwise.'<sup>4</sup>

Ideologically, the Home Rule Leagues operated on a supra-communal network and pursued a non-communal programme, a fact which encouraged many Muslims to swell the ranks of Annie Besant's adherents. For instance, Abdul Majid Khwaja, a successful lawyer and a contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru at Cambridge, set up a Home Rule League branch in Aligarh with the backing of Haji Musa Khan, a leading *rais* of Datauli and one of the stalwarts at the Aligarh College. Some young lawyers and journalists, close to Motilal Nehru, did the same in Allahabad. In Lucknow its main adherents were several prominent lawyers and journalists.

The growth of political radicalism among Muslims was in reaction to the quickening tempo of events—the annulment of Bengal's partition and British machinations in Turkey. Paradoxical as it may seem, their 'extra-territorial patriotism' served to hasten the development of their territorial patriotism also. The aggression of Western powers hastened their disillusionment with the policy of traditional reliance on the government, and the rejection of the Muslim university scheme and the Kanpur mosque incident made it clear that Muslim interests at home were of no greater consequence to their rulers than their sentiments with regard to their brethren abroad. The effect of the Balkan Wars, observed the Chief Secretary to the Punjab Government, helped to unify Muslim sentiment, extend the pan-Islamic idea, stimulate the cry of 'Islam in Danger' and afford the 'hot-headed literati, editors,



schoolmasters and journalists' to conduct their anti-government agitation.<sup>5</sup>

It was left to Hardinge (1858-1944) to heal some of the wounds left by that deep gash in the body of India—the partition of Bengal. He did so by revoking the partition, a decision which caused much disaffection among Muslims. The Viceroy was also unable to meet their demand relating to the Muslim university scheme. The great project, conceived by the successors of Syed Ahmad Khan, juddered to a halt because the Secretary of State for India and his Council objected to the scheme to affiliate colleges outside the province. And in dealing with the pan-Islamic ferment in India, Hardinge was constrained by the dictates of European diplomacy and by the anti-Turkish strain of the British Government's policy. He tried in vain to impress London with the strength of pan-Islamic feelings in India over the Italian attack upon Tripoli. Remote from contact with the Indian scene it was difficult for the India Office to feel the feverishly rising pulse of pan-Islamism. Hardinge told the Secretary of State for India that the Foreign Office did not sufficiently appreciate the difficulties which the Government of India were having with the Indian Muslims over Turkey. Some years later, Montagu told Chelmsford that their 'resentment appears so remote from the minds of my colleagues'.<sup>6</sup>

The unmistakable shift in government policy profoundly altered the tenor of Muslim League politics. To begin with, the politics of collaboration, pursued by its politically conservative leadership, was effectively questioned by an influential group of lawyers, journalists and a section of the *ulama*. Shibli Nomani (1857-1914), Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), Hasrat Mohani (1877-1951), Zafar Ali Khan (1873-1956), Mohamed Ali and many of their followers were decisively against the



political methods of the first generation of Aligarh Muslim leaders, affirmed their commitment to agitational methods and believed in working out the political destiny of their compatriots in unison with the rest of the Indian people. Instead of being haunted by the spectre of Hindu domination, they regarded the Congress in a favourable light and endorsed its political creed.

Shibli Nomani was among the most influential exponents of the idea of cooperation and accommodation with the Hindus in general and the Congress, in particular. In a series of perceptive essays, published in 1912, he berated the reactionary political methods of the Muslim League and exposed the short-sightedness of its leadership. The League, in contrast to the Congress which pursued a comprehensive and constructive economic and political programme, was merely interested in a larger share for Muslims in government services and extension of separate electorates to municipalities and district boards. Pursuit of sectional interests could not be rewarding because politics, according to Shibli, made sense only with organised political parties under forward-looking leaders. In drawing yet another point of contrast, he pointed out that the Congress had not drawn its leaders from the titled and landed gentry, whereas the League was completely in the hands of such people, who could never be courageous enough to sacrifice their selfish and material interests by taking a firm stand against government. Above all, the eminent *alim* of Nadwa believed in a concerted Hindu-Muslim effort to achieve common political objectives. He reminded Muslims of the bonds of unity which had prevailed between the two communities during medieval rule in India. "This was an old story," he wrote, "but even today go to the villages and see for yourself the brotherly feelings that exist between Hindus and

Muslims, and the two communities participate in each other's functions as if they were related to each other by family ties.'"<sup>7</sup>

Expressed by a highly respected and reputed scholar who had impeccable credentials with his community, these ideas received deserved consideration. This was particularly so because of the League's passive role and its preoccupation with constitutional issues. Khaliquzzaman recalled the dominance of 'the titled gentry, nawabs, landlords and *Jee Huzoors*' who served the 'Muslim cause' only so far as it did not affect their position either socially or in government quarters. The League activities were confined to 'indoor political shows' and its annual sessions were held either in well-decorated *pandals* or in big halls where a few honourable members were allowed by special cards.<sup>8</sup>

Changes in the League, both in terms of its class composition and in the nature of its demands, began to occur around 1911. The first noticeable development was the transfer of its office (January 1910) from Aligarh to Lucknow, the home of a fairly substantial Muslim professional group and the storm centre of an overtly anti-government movement against the Nagri resolution of April 1900. The League at Aligarh was an adjunct of a college dominated by those who learnt their lesson of loyalty to government and opposition to Congress at the feet of Syed Ahmad Khan. But with the initiative passing into the hands of the politically advanced Lucknow-based leaders, the newly-vitalized organization came to reflect, slowly but steadily, the radical temper of Muslim groups represented by Shibli, Azad, Mohamed Ali, Wazir Hasan, Zafar Ali Khan and Mazharul Haq (1866-1930). Described by their contemporaries as the 'younger men' and seen by themselves as standard-bearers of 'new ideals', 'new forces' and *nai raushni* (new light), these men secured their major



victory in 1913 when a new clause proclaiming the aim of the League to work with other groups for 'a system of self-government suitable to India' was incorporated in the revised constitution.

Forster, who visited Aligarh in October 1912, sensed the drift of things. "Life at Aligarh shows many seams", he noted in his diary on 25 October 1912: "The English staff complained that they were not trusted to give the help they had hoped to give, but would be turned adrift as soon as the Mohammedans do stand without them: they could make some way with the students—not much, owing to the influence of the *Comrade*, a forward Islamic paper 'which told lies', and none at all with the government body. The Mohammedans had an air of desperation, which may be habitual, but was impressive; why should Sir Edward Grey have been the *first* to recognize Italian rule in Tripoli (By the Peace of Ouchy in 15 October 1912, Turkey recognized the Italian occupation of Tripoli, its erstwhile province), they asked, and pertinently."<sup>9</sup>

## II

Changes in Aligarh and other areas of northern India had no real impact on Delhi where Muslims had no organized political life of their own. The All-India Muslim League had a branch with a limited membership of 1,316; the rest were educational and religious bodies, such as the All-India *Ahl-i-Hadith Conference*, founded in 1912, the *Anjuman-i-Ahmadiya*, formed in 1880, and the *Anjuman-i-Hidayatul-Islam*, established in 1906 to propagate Islamic education in the countryside through the setting up of *madrasas*. Their activities were centred round the Juma Masjid, the Fatehpuri mosque and the famous *madrasas* which had retained their hold despite the



growing influence of more renowned seminaries like the *Dar-al-Ulum* at Deoband and the *Nadvat-al-Ulama* in Lucknow. But there was little talk of politics in Delhi generally and among Muslims particularly. Many were still wary of associating themselves with political issues because they could recount the trauma of 1857, when their co-religionists had to pay a heavy price for taking part in the revolt.

The general apathy towards politics could not be allowed to continue for long by leaders of other regions who were out to extend their sphere of influence in the newly-created capital of British India. In order to generate some interest, the Muslim League held its annual session in Delhi in 1910. But this move proved abortive because the Delhi Muslims did not take an active part in its deliberations. Irrked by what was considered a rebuff, the League stalwarts decided not to include any Delhi Muslim among the office-bearers.

News of the Turko-Italian War, however, transformed the political scene in and around Delhi. Much religious fervour was generated by a sudden burst of political activity, a steady rise in the publication and circulation of newspapers and the mushroom growth of organizations formed to befriend the beleaguered Turkey.

The diffuse sentiment that arose against the tyranny of the Christian countries found focus and leadership in the activities of Mohamed Ali. It was officially recorded that pan-Islamism had little footing in India till 1912, when Mohamed Ali removed the *Comrade* to Delhi. Soon after, the paper was joined by the *Hamdard*, in Urdu. These journalistic ventures received unprecedented popularity. The energy, skill and buoyancy that Mohamed Ali brought to his enterprises would have probably ensured this anyway; but the fact that they caught the tide of Muslim public opinion at the turn and

expressed pungently and clearly what many Muslims were vaguely thinking, proved to be an added asset. In more specific terms, the *Comrade* and the *Hamdard* offered a framework for the uneasiness and dissatisfaction of important Muslim groups, moulded their attitudes towards government and, above all, focussed on the news from the Balkan front which unfolded the story of Turkey's military reverses, and raised the spectre of European forces advancing into the heartlands of the Islamic world.

Mohamed Ali's influence was unrivalled in his days. His every move was followed avidly and with overwhelming approval by most Muslims. He acted as guide and counsellor of many, including Ansari who rarely acted against his advice. It is easy to understand why this was so. Since the foundation of the All-India Muslim League in December 1906, Mohamed Ali was the very model of a leader on the move—bold, outspoken to the point of brashness and confident as reformer and social radical, as crusader for the Turkish cause and as champion of Muslim political interests.<sup>10</sup> And one other thing: he did not shun the limelight. He was always an activist, always restless, always eager and always imbued with a profound sense of playing the leading part in a great drama. He took centre stage so quickly and so dramatically that his detractors often suspected him of being in the middle of one conspiracy and on the fringe of another. But there was nothing conspiratorial or the surreptitious about his interests or actions. In nearly everything he said and wrote, his overriding concern was to foster his community's interests in India and abroad. But this is not how all contemporaries viewed his role. Cynical and ill-informed government officials—his *bete noire* for long-attributed motives of money and publicity to denigrate him and pooh-poohed the causes he so vociferously championed.



The extent of Mohamed Ali's influence is evident from the fact that two of his favourite projects—the medical mission and the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*—struck the most respondent chord in the hearts of the Delhi Muslims. The mission was generously funded by traders, merchants and weavers. The *Anjuman*, on the other hand, increased its membership from 900 to 2,000 in June 1914 owing to the active and enthusiastic backing of the hide and shoe merchants, the butchers, the artisans of the city and the students of the *madrastas*, including those from the *Nazarat-al-Ma'arif-al-Quraniya*, an institution founded in 1913 by Maulana Ubaidullah Sinddhi (1872-1944) of Deoband to extend the teachings of the *Qur'an* and Islamic theology to members of the 'new Muslim party'. Many of these activities owed much to Mohamed Ali's initiative. The troubles, observed H.C. Beadon, Deputy Commissioner of Delhi, began in 1912-1913 when Mohamed Ali started his two newspapers and launched the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*. He thus boomed the Turkish connection and seized the opportunity of the Balkan Wars to excite Muslim feelings. All this made it inevitable that the Khilafat question, when it was to become a political issue in 1919, had its supporters in Delhi already organized.

Ansari, fresh from his professional success in England, entered into Delhi's political scene unobtrusively.

## NOTES

1. *New Era* (Lucknow), 30 June 1917.
2. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 31-2.
3. *New Era*, 23 June 1917.
4. *Ibid.*, 30 June 1917.
5. To Secretary, Home Department, 11 October 1913, Hardinge Papers (86), Cambridge University Library, Cambridge. Also, 'Note on Serious Disturbances and Political Troubles in India from 1907 to 1917', Home Poll. Deposit, February 1918, 31, NAI.



6. Montagu to Chelmsford, 31 March 1919, Chelmsford Papers (5).
7. *Maqalat-i-Shibli* (Azamgarh, 1938), Vol. 6, pp. 161-90; also summary in K.B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948* (Karachi, 1968 edn.), pp. 36-7.
8. Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961), pp. 137-8.
9. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, p. 227.
10. I have examined his ideology and politics in *Mohamed Ali: Ideology and politics* (Delhi, 1981).

## Pan-Islamism at Home and Abroad

THOUGH it is only a guess, it is a fair and legitimate guess that Ansari watched with close attention the political developments around. It was under the influence of Mohamed Ali, for whom he retained a deep and lasting veneration in spite of subsequent political differences, that he was drawn into the vortex of public life and developed an interest in the troubled affairs of the Muslim community. He embraced politics less for ambition than from a sense of duty. He strove for power not for the sake of material rewards or personal prestige, but because he knew that he possessed talents and wanted to use them to do some good—by which he meant promoting the interests of the country and the community, he belonged to. But, then, he had his own way to make in the world. Unlike many of his London friends, he had no family wealth or connections to hoist him into a ready-made political niche.

Events in the Balkans, which turned out to be a prelude to the final dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, influenced Ansari most. As news of the unprincipled Italian invasion of Tripoli trickled through the columns of the *Comrade*, he discerned clear signs of a conspiracy to destroy and annex the few remaining Muslim states. He was disturbed by Britain's role, for as the Balkan Wars progressed, it became evident that much water had flown since Britain fought side by side with Turkey against Russia half a century ago. The view gained

credence, not unjustifiably, that Britain had acquiesced in the Italian assault upon Tripoli. This triggered off a reaction of serious proportions and virtually guaranteed new spates of headlines in the newly emboldened Urdu Press. "There is a great agitation," reported the Viceroy, "in Muslim circles over the war in the Balkans, and a general feeling that the Christians are combining to thrust the Muslims out of Europe." The Government of India, which had hitherto regarded the events in the Balkans with cool disdain, was forced to say that it could no longer cover up British culpability.

Indian Muslims conceived a number of projects to voice their concern. The *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba* was one; the medical mission to Turkey was another. Ansari's active association with the mission was a turning point in his public life and his political ideas were affected strongly by his experience in 1912 and 1913. Of all his life, these were the most formative years.

News of the medical mission first appeared in the *Comrade* on 19 October 1912: "Those who know Dr Ansari's greatest ability as physician and surgeon, will hail the idea of a relief mission under his direction with delight." Ansari's own views appeared in the *Comrade* of 26 October. He wrote:

The Turk has been fighting ever since he established his Empire on the shores of the Bosphorus and has so far survived the deadliest of struggles. Yet never before in the annals of the Ottoman Empire had he to face a situation so critical in nature, so difficult to handle and so dangerous in consequences as he has now before him. It is perfectly obvious that the very existence of the Turkish nation depends upon the issue



of this war. Firstly, the medical service in the Turkish Army has been very recently organized and as such will be unable to cope with the requirements of such a deadly war. Secondly, Turkey's foes are already receiving, on a very large scale, medical...help from all parts of Europe; and the poor Turk is left entirely to his own limited resources. What we can do to lighten his burden is to provide an efficient field-hospital where a fair number of the sick and wounded can be accommodated.

He concluded with an appeal for public subscriptions. This met with an immediate and overwhelming response; by the end of November 1912, the total contribution for the Turkish Relief Fund reached Rs. 1,18,762. The Red Crescent Society of Delhi and other Muslims of the city raised Rs. 32,000. Contributions also came from the ladies of Hyderabad, from the *dargah* at Ajmer and from the *Sajjada-nashins* of Fatehgarh and Sassaram.

Ansari claimed that his mission was 'truly All-India' as it included representatives from every province of British India. "It is gratifying to notice," he continued, "that the men who have joined the mission are from the cultured middle and higher class families, representing the flower of Muhammadan youth, who are fully alive to the responsibilities and nature of the work with which they are entrusted."<sup>1</sup> The mission was formed of five doctors, seven dressers, and ten male nurses and ambulance bearers. The Old Boys of the Aligarh College were well represented, no less than eight of the twenty-one proceeding from India had studied for some time at and, in some cases, graduated from Aligarh. Among them were Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, Shuaib Qureshi and Khaliquzzaman, all

bound to Ansari by deep personal loyalty and affection. Khaliquzzaman, who met Ansari on 13 November 1912 at Aligarh where the students had given up their weekly *piece de resistance* of *pulau*, *zarda* and *firnee* to raise Rs. 6,500 for the Turkish Relief Fund, recorded his meeting:

News was received which spread like wildfire in the College of an attack of the Balkan powers on Turkey. We had already decided to give up meat diet during the Tripoli war agitation and now we took steps to collect funds between ourselves and sent the savings to the Red Crescent Society in Turkey... One day while I was playing tennis in front of my room...I was introduced as the football captain of my College eleven to Dr Ansari. I expressed my joy and admiration for him for having undertaken the responsibility of leading the medical mission. He told me that he had come to Aligarh to find some youngmen to go with him to help him in the discharge of his duties. I said, "I am not a doctor." He replied, "You can do managerial work as well as some nursing," after which he left me seriously cogitating over the matter. By the evening, I had made up my mind to join the mission.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of a medical mission found favour because it carried to Muslims in Turkey a message of deep sympathy and goodwill from their co-religionists in India; Viqar-ul-Mulk (1841-1917), Secretary of the Aligarh College, said so in his letter of 29 June 1913.<sup>3</sup> In Delhi alone, 15,000 Muslims accompanied the members of the mission all the way from Juma Masjid to the railway station to bid them farewell.<sup>4</sup>



Mohamed Ali was jubilant: "In joy and in grief the heart of Islam beats in unison, but this is the first time in the history of Indian Mussalmans that their sympathy had taken shape as a humane and beneficent measure to relieve the sufferings of their brethren abroad who lie torn and bleeding. The moral value of this fact can hardly be over-estimated."<sup>5</sup> Ansari might have recognized the throng on the railway platform. The Viceroy had sent a representative; Ajmal Khan was on the platform with his beard and animated gestures, leaning on his walking stick with its silver band and braced for a parting of poignant significance. Several Muslim divines were there too, so that the *ulama* might be associated with this departure of the mission and their blessings bestowed upon it. They were probably inspired by the example of Shibli Nomani who touched Ansari's feet at the Lucknow railway station in a touching demonstration of his affection for the leader of the medical mission.<sup>6</sup> Mohamed Ali was there of course, because he had much to do both with the choice of Ansari as leader of the mission and with the setting of this scene.

Ansari seemed a trifle overawed by the circumstances of his departure. His short speech was diffident. Habitually modest, he took care to emphasize that this send-off was not a tribute to himself but to the efforts of the people who helped organize the mission.

The mission sailed from Bombay on 15 December 1912, reaching Constantinople on 1 January. The story of its work and experience was told with a minute exactitude in Ansari's letters, published in the *Comrade*, which were the longest and most descriptive he ever wrote. They present his experiences, embellished as a theatrical panorama, with himself a figure in centre stage. They reveal his unflagging interest in Turkey which never left him and further indicate that his experiences



in that country set him on the path of strong opposition to British Imperial rule in India which characterized so much of his life.

When Ansari reached Turkey the long night of Hamidian despotism was long over and the dawn of freedom had come in July 1908, when the constitution had once again been proclaimed and elections ordered. The Young Turk Revolution, led by the Committee of Union and Progress, achieved many of its objectives and its three important leaders – Enver Bey (1881-1922), Talat Bey (1872-1926) and Kemal Bey (1840-1888) – remained in effective control.

Ansari was fascinated by the activities of the Young Turks, baffled by the machinations of European powers and aghast at the 'inhuman deeds done by the Balkan Armies during the occupation of Salonica and Kavalla'. What he witnessed and experienced strengthened his determination 'to do all that lay in our power to lessen the sufferings, to sympathize with and soothe the bleeding hearts of our fellow-Muslims in Turkey.'<sup>7</sup> But the going was often tough. Members of the mission had to set up hospitals, build bridges and pitch tents in the 'teeth of a most bitterly cold wind and the mud almost knee-deep'<sup>8</sup> There were moments of frustration as well. "I cannot tell you what difficulties are placed in our way here in arranging a small matter" complained Ansari. "Our things have all arrived last week, and in any other country but Turkey everything would have been arranged in a day or two."<sup>9</sup> He went on to utter a cry of absolute despair: "My men and myself have been driven to eating nothing but cheese and bread for three days, owing to the box containing our provisions having been stolen by someone."<sup>10</sup> Such hardships did not dampen Ansari's enthusiasm. He and his comrades worked with characteristic energy to alleviate the plight and

sufferings of the Turks. "We have all been working terribly hard," he reported on 22 February 1913: "I may tell you that our field-hospital, if not the best, is second to none in Turkey. Not only are our wards, dispensary, operating theatre and general provision most excellent, but every member of the mission has got the zeal and energy of ten persons and a most excellent *esprit de corps* exists among them, of which I naturally feel very proud."

There can be no doubt that Ansari was entranced by Turkey which was the last vestige of Islamic activity and impressed with its military prowess both in the past and in his own times. He was carried away by the ruins of the fortress in Vienna, which was captured by the Turks under Suleiman (1496-1566). His imagination was fired by brilliant scenes of the past, almost as if he had lived it and he recalled with pride the glories of the Turkish Empire extended over three continents: from Baghdad to Budapest and from Cairo to the boundaries of Morocco. "It had been a remarkable career of achievements", he wrote in 1925, "many years after Turkish military prestige had declined and the myth of the invincibility of Turkish troops shattered." Ansari continued: "Probably in no other dynasty in the world's history has there ever been a succession of such brilliant rulers... The Turk may well take immense pride in his glorious military heritage."<sup>11</sup>

In 1912-13, Ansari identified Turkish military prowess with the Young Turks who had salvaged Turkey's waning prestige. This is borne out by his description of the *coup d'etat* engineered by Enver Bey on 23 January 1913. Commenting on the coup and on Enver Bey's success, Ansari opined: "It is obvious that the Young Turks have saved the prestige of Turkey and mean to die honourably, if death must come. It is impossible even for an adversary to abstain from admiring



their pluck, although it still remains to be seen whether this pluck is going to save Turkey.’’<sup>12</sup>

Ansari also admired some leading Turkish nationalists he met. Among those who impressed him most was Enver Bey, ‘a young man of about 35, exceedingly handsome, with most expressive eyes full of determination and with a demeanour of a very strong man, chastened with hardships and sufferings’.<sup>13</sup> He and Zafar Ali Khan had several meetings with him. After one such *tete-a-tete*, Ansari wrote that Enver Bey ‘believed in working loyally for his God and country’ and was sure that Turkey would rise soon to ‘its full glory and power’. Ansari also got together with Halide Edib, ‘one of the leading lights of the Party of Union and Progress, a silent, though very effective power working behind the scenes’;<sup>14</sup> Khalil Beg ‘a gallant soldier’ who performed invaluable service against the Bulgarian regiment with his band of volunteers from Crete, Arabia and Anatolia; Talat Bey, with whom Ansari discussed the proposal for the sale of Turkish bonds in India; and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Chawish, ‘a very impressive man who chooses every word before uttering it’.<sup>15</sup>

To provide medical relief was not Ansari’s sole concern. He was equally active in promoting schemes which would render moral and material support to the Turks and help reaffirm his countrymen’s solidarity with their struggle; in fact, he indicated in some of his speeches that he thought less of the medical work he had done than of the political results between Turkey and the Indian Muslims and that in doing so, he was no ideologue but a patient, open-minded and resourceful pragmatist.

The sale of Turkish bonds, originating in a discussion with Talat Bey, was one of Ansari’s favourite schemes. So great was his enthusiasm that he planned an extensive tour to



popularize it in India. "I would deal in my lectures", he wrote to Mohamed Ali, "with Turkey, its people, its institutions, its government, the war and its results...the future of Turkey and the way in which the Mussalmans of India can best help the Turks and themselves...I wish to start in Bombay, go to, Hyderabad, Bhopal, Lucknow, Rampur, Aligarh and Delhi. And then later on I will go to Lahore, Meerut, Allahabad, Banaras, Bankipur and Calcutta."<sup>16</sup> He also planned the setting up of a Muslim Bank, a Cooperative Society and a university at Medina. Ansari and Zafar Ali Khan were members of the Constitution Committee. Urging Mohamed Ali to discuss the much canvassed university scheme with Shibli and Iqbal, Ansari wrote: "We have sent you a cable and hope you will not spare any pains in preparing the constitution and curriculum for the University of Medina on the lines of the Aligarh University."<sup>17</sup> Then, there was the colonization scheme for refugees in Anatolia 'to sow the seeds of greater things'. "We have had several meetings of the Colonization Society," Ansari reported to Mohamed Ali on 27 May 1913, "and a definite plan of work has been decided. Tomorrow a committee consisting of five persons [Ansari, Zafar Ali Khan, Agah Bey (representing Ottoman Red Crescent), Saleh Bey, an agricultural expert and Ahmed Foad] is going to Anatolia to see the tracts of the land, the government is willing to place at the disposal of the Society...The Committee has been given every facility by the government to inspect these tracts. The members are going first to Angora to see 65,000 acres of land in Qara Ilias, then to Konia and Qulihishla by train and from there by carriages to Adana, where 45,000 acres of land near Jabali-Barakat are available. The exact location of the two villages would be decided after the completion of the tour."<sup>18</sup>

Many of these hastily-conceived projects failed to take off and were ignored in Turkey and forgotten in India. But the

sincere and devoted work of the mission received wide acclaim in both countries. The scenes of leave-taking at Hindia and Sanjak Tepi where the two hospitals were established, were “most touching and will remain in our memory.”<sup>19</sup> Ansari would have felt the same way when he and his men reached Bombay on the first part of their journey on 4 July 1913. Arriving at the Ballard Pier, leaning on the arm of Mohamed Ali and looking pale and worn out but in good spirits, Ansari and his comrades were greeted by Fazulbhoy Currimbhoy (b. 1872) and Umar Subhani and by cheering crowds bearing banners with hospitable inscriptions and carrying garlands and flowers.<sup>20</sup> A similar welcome awaited them in Delhi on the evening of 10 July. The *Comrade* reported:

Long before the time of arrival large crowds of people had begun to assemble on the platform and along the approaches to the railway station... As the train moved slowly in, the air was rent with glad shouts of welcome. Thousands on the platform pressed forward to catch a glimpse of the man and his lieutenants, who had rendered good services to Islam, to kiss their hands and offer them flowers and garlands.

As the party entered the vast courtyard of the mosque (Juma Masjid) it was greeted by thousands of Muslims of Delhi... They were all inspired by a single sentiment and filled with a single aim—to do honour to the men who had made sacrifices in the cause of Islam... After the Maghrib prayers the procession was formed again and it started along a different route for the Fatehpuri Mosque... The entire Muslim Delhi seemed to have turned out for the occasion, [and]



nothing but surging masses of humanity were visible in unbroken waves as far as the eye could reach in either direction... Every now and then loud and irresistible voices called Dr Ansari to stand up and show himself and he could not but obey the call. And one can never forget the emotion of the moment as the hero of the occasion raised himself bashfully from his seat and in his characteristically modest way acknowledged the vociferous greetings of thousands of his admiring brethren—the lusty cheers of the youth, the applause of the grown-up men and the blessings of the aged. It was amidst such thrilling scenes that the long route was slowly traversed and the procession reached its destination... Such remarkable tributes of love and admiration are ample rewards for men who serve a noble cause and prove themselves of some use to their fellow-beings.<sup>21</sup>

## II

Soon after his return from Turkey, Ansari got mixed up in the Kanpur mosque episode—an episode sparked off by the sacrilege committed by the municipality in demolishing a portion of the Machli Bazar mosque as part of the city improvement scheme. But his part in the agitation, whipped up by the irrepressible Mohamed Ali, did not extend beyond accompanying Ajmal Khan on his weekly visits to Kanpur to treat those wounded in the police firing of 3 August. His role in the Muslim university movement was also limited. Though a member of the Foundation Committee and of several deputations, his own links with the college at Aligarh were tenuous. Not being an 'Old Boy' he could hardly be expected



to share the enthusiasm of the Ali Brothers, Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, Shuaib Qureshi and Khaliquzzaman. Supporting the university cause was dictated by personal and political considerations: loyalty to Mohamed Ali combined with the need to remain in the mainstream of Muslim political life. At the same time his political interests were widening and he was not only learning rapidly but growing in stature all the time. To compare Ansari of 1912-13, at the time of the medical mission, with Ansari at the time of the Muslim League session in 1918, is to see at once the distance he had travelled and the confidence he had gained. The same determination and ability were there, but tempered by a maturing of powers, a deepening of character and experience.

Ansari's heart was in several pan-Islamic schemes. Notable amongst them were the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba* and the *Nazarat-al-Ma'arif-al-Quraniya*, set up in the Fatehpuri mosque not far from Ansari's consulting chambers. He was one of the patrons of this *Quranic* school, having helped to raise financial support from the Nawab of Rampur, the Begum of Bhopal and a number of wealthy Muslim traders from Bombay and Karachi.

Ansari also helped to bring about close relations between the *ulama* and a section of Western-educated Muslims. He was in an ideal position to do so because of his family connections with Deoband. He introduced Ubaidullah Sindhi to Mohamed Ali and Azad. He came into contact with Abdul Bari (1878-1926), the distinguished *alim* of Firangi Mahal, Lucknow, when the Maulana and his *madrassa* students travelled in UP collecting money for Turkish relief and for the Red Crescent Medical Mission. The scheme to set up the *Nazarat-al-Ma'arif*, mooted by Mahmud Hasan, Ansari and Ajmal Khan, was intended to reconcile the Deoband and Aligarh traditions

of education and provide the necessary thrust to the converging courses in politics of the modern and the traditionally educated. Likewise, the *Jalsa-i-Dastarbandi*, convened in 1910 and attended by a delegation from Aligarh led by Aftab Ahmad Khan (1867-1930), the *Jamiyat-al-Ansar*, founded by Ubaidullah Sindhi and the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*, established in May 1912, were positive efforts to bridge the gulf that separated the modern and the traditionally-educated Muslims. Such initiatives were both timely and rewarding because of the mutual recognition that a unified effort was the only effective way of building a powerful movement in defence of Muslim interests in India and abroad. The 'orthodox' and the 'anglicised' were drawn together and 'saw that after all they were not so unlike each other as they had imagined'. "Once more," declared Mohamed Ali, "Muslim society in India presented a level of uniformity and the bitterest opponents of a generation ago stood shoulder to shoulder...If even a decade previously anyone had ventured to foretell such a result, he would have been laughed at for such a fantastic prophesy."<sup>22</sup>

The Muslim League session of December 1918 provided the most striking evidence of the growing fraternization between the 'orthodox' and the 'anglicised' Muslims. A large number of *ulama*, drawn from different regions and representing various theological schools, were present. They had never done so before. What was equally unusual was that they asserted their right to speak and be consulted on both the political and the religious issues concerning their community. This, too, they had not done before. Politics to them had become all of a sudden a necessary part of their faith, which explains why they not only appeared at all subsequent conferences organized by the League and the Khilafat Com-



mittee, but also influenced major policy decisions. Having perceived the growing threat to Islam, they realized that they must now be active in addressing themselves to the current anxieties—political, social and religious—of Indian Muslims, or else see true Islam as they understood it and their own claims to guide the community go by default.

The presence of the *ulama* was largely due to Ansari's effort. He invited them in order to add weight to the Khilafat protest, assured them a prominent place on the platform and sang paeon of praise in their honour. He was also the star performer as Chairman of the Reception Committee, delivered a powerful speech, later proscribed by the Punjab Government. "His address", according to a government report, "resembled the sermon of a fanatic, more than the address of a politician and amounts to a condemnation to death of the King of the Hejaz and an exhortation to Jihad if Mesopotamia, Arabia and Palestine are not handed back to Turkey. It accuses Great Britain of breaking her promise to respect the sanctity of the Holy Places and demands the independence of the Muslims of North Africa and Central Asia. Dr Ansari's demands were supported throughout by quotations from the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, and the speech... had an extraordinary effect on the audience. The Muslim League of that period regularly took its cue from the Congress and the methods employed to stampede opinion into the ultra extremist camp met with as great success as in the Congress pandal. As they dispersed, members were heard cursing the destroyers of Islam and strong anti-British feeling was evident."

Interspersed with extensive quotations from the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, Ansari tried to reassure the *ulama* and allay their fears about the *la-dini* (religion-less) character of the League.



Setting out his ideas with an eloquence and personal feeling that were rare to his time, he echoed the pan-Islamic concerns of his community and articulated the religious demands of the *ulama*, which had so far been ignored by the League. Ansari's manner was direct, his language simple. What he said could scarcely ever be misrepresented; where he stood none could mistake. He attracted attention in any crowd with his frank, serious look and by the firmness of his views and the force of his personality.

Ansari was now a recognized leader of the north Indian Muslims and honours began to fall on him like the leaves of autumn. The Sultan of Turkey in recognition of his services conferred on him the second class of the Usmanieh order. The *Anjuman-i-Islamia* of Bombay gave him a welcome. Here he spoke of the success of the medical mission, a 'wonderful conception' on the part of Indian Muslims. The Begum of Bhopal feted him and showered words of praise for his sense of devotion. He was specially invited to the Friday congregation at the Delhi Juma Masjid on 11 July 1913 where he described the struggle of the Turks against the Christian powers "who are bent upon wiping Islam from the face of the earth"; for obvious reasons he tried to smother their deficiencies under a flood of eloquence about their patriotic cause. A day later, he lectured amidst a rousing reception at the Aligarh College, where he had raised Rs. 45,000 for the medical mission on his last visit. Here he assured his audience that the spirit of the Turkish nation was not dead and boasted that the most important result of his trip was the fusion of a union between Turkey and India. On 29-30 November he spoke on the colonization scheme in Amritsar and gave an illustrated account of his work at the two hospitals, one near Chetalja at Hindia and the other at Chanak Qela, near Dardanelles.<sup>23</sup>

Everybody was impressed. Mohamed Ali 'privately' suggested to Meston, Lt. Governor of Uttar Pradesh, to honour Ansari by making him the Viceroy's surgeon and to grant him and other members of the mission the Kaiser-i-Hind medal.<sup>24</sup> Shibli Nomani sang paeans of praise and expressed the gratitude of the Muslims in a poem which came to be recited in the towns of northern India. This must have surely gladdened Ansari. To him the trip to Turkey was a novel experience and coming on top of the impressions left by his journey around the world, it had a powerful effect in crystallizing his ideas. His journey in 1913 provided the experience he needed to fire his imagination and opened a new world to him. He returned to India intellectually stimulated, full of ideas and with the energy to put them across.

When the intelligence department secured some letters implicating Ansari in a pan-Islamic conspiracy, Meston declared that he was not the stuff of which conspirators were made.<sup>25</sup> His professional character 'stands high, unlike that of some of the other men who have recently been interned. Quite moderate men think well of him and regard him as a capable professional man, distinguished by the friendships abroad and reasonably interested in Muhammadan politics generally, without committing himself in any way, so far as they know, to extreme views.'<sup>26</sup> Opposing the move to arrest Ansari, the Lt. Governor reiterated that his participation in a conspiracy was unlikely. He concluded:

In Moslem circles he commands considerable respect and moderate men regard him much more highly than, for example, Muhammad Ali or those who have been more recently interned. His work in the mission during the last Turkish War is a matter of pride to them, as

well as the professional position which he occupies in India; a firebrand is not what he is generally regarded as being.<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 *Comrade*, 30 November 1912.
- 2 Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, p. 21.
- 3 R.A. Jafri, *Karawan-i-Gumgushta* (Karachi, 1971), pp. 333-4.
- 4 *Comrade*, 9 August 1912.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 14 December 1912; Ghaffar, *Hayat-i-Ajmal*, pp. 122-3.
- 6 Sulaiman Nadvi, *Hayat-i-Shibli*, p. 595; Jafri, *Karawan-i-Gumgushta*, pp. 315-6.
- 7 *Comrade*, 25 January 1913.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 22 February 1913.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 15 February 1913.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 22 February 1913.
- 11 Ansari to Mohamed Ali, 25 July 1925, *Ibid.*, 18 September 1925.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 22 February 1913.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 15 February 1913.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 8 February 1913.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, 17 May and 7 June 1913.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 31 May 1913.
- 18 Ansari to Mohamed Ali, 27 May 1913, Ansari Collection, NMML. Also, see report submitted by B. Lindsay and Abdur Rauf on the internment of the Ali Brothers. Hasan (ed.), *Mohamed Ali in Indian Politics*, Vol. 2, pp. 145, 159-61. The scheme of colonization was supported by the *Comrade* in a series of articles contributed by Abdur Rahman Siddiqi. See Bamford, *Histories*, p. 113. Urdu extract of Ansari's letters are quoted in Jafri, *Karawan-i-Gumgushta*, pp. 326-8.
- 19 Ansari to Mohamed Ali, 27 May 1913, Ansari Collection, NMML; *Comrade*, 31 June 1913.
- 20 *Comrade*, 5 July 1913; Jafri, *Karawan-i-Gumgushta*, p. 337.
- 21 *Comrade*, 12 July 1913.
- 22 Afzal Iqbal (ed.), *My life: A Fragment*, p. 44.
- 23 *Comrade*, 20 December 1913.
- 24 Mohamed Ali to Meston, 30 June 1913, Hardinge Papers (85).



- 25 'On the other hand', he continued, 'the more respectable Mahomedans have considerable regard for him; they are rather proud of the part that he took in organizing and taking out a medical mission to Turkey during the last Balkan War. Since his return his prestige has been considerable, he has a large medical practice of a thoroughly reputable character; and I believe, he has taken to the ordinary duties of intelligent citizenship in Delhi'. Meston to Chelmsford, 7 September 1916, Chelmsford Papers (17).
- 26 Meston to Charles Cleveland, 6 September 1916, Meston Papers (4).
- 27 Note on Ansari's arrest, 6 September 1916, Meston Papers (1). The Viceroy agreed and the proposal to arrest Ansari was dropped. Chelmsford to Meston, 16/17 September 1916, Chelmsford Papers (17).

## Among the Satyagrahis

THE countrywide agitation against the Rowlatt Bills, enacted by the government and foisted on the country with scant regard for public opinion, offered Ansari an opportunity to plunge into national politics. By 1919, this shy and youthful doctor with limited experience of public life moved to the epicentre of the Rowlatt *satyagraha*.

Though Ansari's political exertions in his early years were inspired by Mohamed Ali, he was equally captivated by the charisma, prestige and personal authority of Gandhi. He had not worked with the Mahatma before, but had admired him from afar and was won over by him in the course of the agitation for Mohamed Ali's release from internment. He was so moved by his initiatives that, at the 1918 Muslim League session, he lionized and extolled Gandhi as the 'acknowledged intrepid leader of India who is never afraid to speak out the truth and who has, by his noble actions, endeared himself as much to the Mussalmans as to the Hindus.'<sup>1</sup> The strength of his charisma and the extent to which his appeal had aroused sentiments against the Rowlatt Bills, impressed itself forcibly upon Ansari and he plunged into the Rowlatt *satyagraha* as the Mahatma's chief lieutenant in Delhi.

The Rowlatt Bills, rushed through the Imperial Legislative Council in the teeth of opposition from all Indian members, evoked widespread indignation in India. The country's rage and revulsion was articulated by Gandhi, the hero of

Champaran, Kaira and Ahmedabad. From his sick bed, he condemned the 'devilish legislation' which was not just 'a stray example of lapse of righteousness and justice' but 'evidence of a determined policy of repression'. When his repeated appeals to the Viceroy to withhold his assent from the 'black bills' failed, he decided on *satyagraha*, a weapon, he had effectively put to use in South Africa. "I think the growing generation will not be satisfied with petitions etc.," he wrote to Dinshaw E. Wacha (1844-1936) on 25 February 1919, "we must give them something effective. *Satyagraha* is the only way, it seems to me, to stop terrorism." In major cities and provincial towns alike people went up against the new legislative provisions and there was excitement all round at the outcome of Gandhi's first ever confrontation with the Raj. The young Jawaharlal was "afire with enthusiasm" because Gandhi offered at last "a way out of the tangle, a method of action which was straight and open and possibly effective."<sup>2</sup>

Various historical accounts have described the upswell of sentiment in favour of the Gandhian movement, delineated the process which enabled divergent groups, often with dissimilar and contradictory interests, to coalesce in a most vigorous assault on government authority, and revealed how the social and economic dislocation caused by the First World War and the Muslim frustration over the indeterminate future of the Khilafat sparked off a serious confrontation with the Raj. In such circumstances, the Rowlatt Act provided the catalyst and Gandhi the spark for ventilating the anger and resentment of aggrieved classes and communities. The Mahatma's ingenuity lay in canalizing their grievances, both latent and active in form, into a massive protest movement.

The quickening pulse of political life in the country, following Gandhi's intervention, had an appreciable impact on



Delhi society. Those who earlier noted the apparent quiescence of political life, suddenly became acutely aware of the perceptibly broadened political outlook of the people in Delhi. The capital was now regarded as the centre from which disturbances in the Punjab and in parts of Uttar Pradesh were promoted. "Delhi is radiating sedition and is the principal source of inspiration for local agitations in the districts around," exclaimed an official.<sup>3</sup> Agitators from Delhi stirred up trouble in the Meerut division, going "in motors as far as Garhmukteswar, and are devoting special attention to Hapur, which is always a difficult place to control."<sup>4</sup> In Moradabad and Bareilly districts the Delhi traders refused to restock the shops of their clients on the ground that they had not followed up their movement.<sup>5</sup> J.P. Thompson, Chief Secretary to the Punjab Government, disclosed on 28 April 1919 that in distant Multan "people are watching Delhi—which is important not only as the historic and present capital, but as the centre of the present disturbances."<sup>6</sup>

## II

Ansari played a principal part in organizing strikes, protest gatherings and demonstrations which occurred in Delhi from February onwards. He was Delhi's most prominent *satyagrahi*, the first President of the Satyagraha Sabha, formed on 24 February 1919 and also the first to take the *satyagraha* vow when Gandhi visited the city on 7 March. His house was the venue of many momentous meetings and his voice in support of *satyagraha* was heard from many platforms, as, on 24 March, when he declared that *satyagraha* was adopted by the Prophet Mohammad himself. He urged all Muslims to take the vow. He also influenced Ajmal Khan, Hasrat Mohani, Asaf

Ali, Abdur Rahman, Arif Husain Hasvi (1888-1936) and Shuaib Qureshi to join the Rowlatt *satyagraha* and to align themselves with the Mahatma. In general, his yeomen service during the months of February to April proved crucial in ensuring popular enthusiasm for the Gandhian movement in Delhi. That is why some officials considered putting him in jail; others preferred deportation. The idea was eventually dropped on the grounds that either of these stringent measures would help foster Hindu-Muslim unity and affect government's credibility.

Some clues to Ansari's role and political disposition are offered in his evidence before the Hunter Commission. From his written statement, submitted on 3 November 1919, we can gauge his commitment to the principles of *satyagraha* and to the element which Gandhi stressed most strongly, non-violence. We are told:

India's share in the war had largely contributed to the entertainment of high aspirations by Indians, which, however, turned out to be extravagant in view of 'the later development of government's policy.' The introduction of the Rowlatt legislation led to unprecedented agitation throughout India. But government enacted the objectionable measure in the teeth of universal opposition, causing profound disappointment and resentment. This naturally led to the adoption of passive resistance in the form of *satyagraha*, i.e., insistence on truth and negation of all violence.

At such a time Mahatma Gandhi had a message of hope to the people of India, *satyagraha* or passive resistance against the Rowlatt Bills was inaugurated at a meeting held at the Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi at



Ahmedabad on Friday, the 24th February 1919. He advocated the only remaining and the most effective constitutional method of agitation against the unjust measures, by practising *satyagraha* or civil resistance. The Mahatma had given to the matter his serious consideration and it was with the sense of full responsibility that he started the *satyagraha* campaign. His own words show the amount of concern and care with which he took this step...

It has been alleged in certain quarters that *satyagraha* was the cause of all disorders during March and April last. This is an absolutely baseless assertion, as can be proved by facts. The principles advocated by *satyagraha*, as described above, had been strictly observed by all *satyagrahis*. Not a single *satyagrahi* has been convicted of any violence. On the contrary, Satyagraha Sabha and *satyagrahis* have always scrupulously observed non-violence and have helped the authorities in restoring order. In Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bombay, concrete instances can be shown to prove this assertion.<sup>7</sup>

Ansari argued that there was nothing new, ominous or threatening in the *hartals*, which, in connection with the *satyagraha* observance, were enjoined as a sign of general protest on the passing of the Rowlatt Act. He pointed out that:

*Hartal* or the suspension of all business is not a new thing in this country. From olden times it has been practised at various special occasions to express the general sorrow or trouble. In Delhi as in many other towns all business was suspended and shops were



closed on receiving the news of the death of Queen Victoria and King Edward the VII, in recent years.... There is nothing, therefore, new or ominous and threatening in *hartal*, as has been stated recently by some persons, in England, as showing the disposition of the people to disorder.<sup>8</sup>

And finally, he spelt out Gandhi's success in terms of the amorphous but widespread discontent against the government which was channelized by the Mahatma into a popular stir through the use of so effective and powerful a weapon as *satyagraha*. The burden of his argument, quite convincingly proved by recent historical researches, was that the tinder of unrest had been drying for months and Gandhi's *satyagraha* was merely the spark which started the conflagration. According to him, *satyagraha* appealed to the masses because India was essentially a religious country and in the mind of the masses any religious creed could easily gain legitimacy and a stronghold. "Satyagraha as such is a creed and I think the masses follow it most extraordinarily and implicitly."

Fearful of violence, Ansari's task was to ward off a possible direct confrontation with the local authorities. But his labours proved fruitless when, during his absence from Delhi there were violent and bloody clashes on 30 March. This spelt danger to the passive resistance movement. So, on his return he tried, along with Shraddhanand and Ajmal Khan, to prevent another round of *hartal* which was planned on 6 April as a day of 'humiliation and prayers'. On the strength of Gandhi's statement of 3 April that violence was inconsistent with *satyagraha*, he was able to persuade the Satyagraha Sabha to give up *hartal*.<sup>9</sup> He recounted:

It became clear in the morning that *hartal* had taken place and an informal consultation of the leading citizens of Delhi took place in my consulting rooms at Fatehpuri to devise means to divert the people from collecting in the Chandni Chowk and the central places of the town. Some two hundred volunteers were sent out to help the preservation of order in the town. A large crowd of people were taken to Fatehpuri mosque to attend the *Fateha* of those who had died of wounds. Permission was obtained from the Deputy Commissioner to hold a public meeting soon after the *Fateha* was over in Edward Park in order to divert the crowd from the Chandni Chowk and with the same purpose another mass meeting was held at Daryaganj, right away in the outskirts of the town. The day passed off quietly and on the next day, the 7th April and the following days, 8th and 9th, business was resumed all over the town and everything was normal.<sup>10</sup>

It is not surprising that Ansari failed in his efforts. The police firing on 30 March had inflamed passions to such an extent that support for a radical course of action gained momentum at a rapid pace; the flames of revolt rose high and every funeral of the victims of police firing occasioned more deaths. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that Ansari's mediatory role, as indeed that of Ajmal Khan, ensured the peaceful observance on 10 April when the news of Gandhi's arrest spread like wild fire and led to a complete *hartal* in Delhi. The *hartal* continued until 19 April and led to fierce clashes between the police and the *satyagrahis*, and the mob assuming control of the agitation. While Ansari and Ajmal Khan were unable to control the multitude, they could



still persuade local authorities, with whom they were *en rapport*, to exercise restraint in dealing with the outburst. If anything, their success in this respect minimized the loss of lives and diffused the growing tension in the city.

Ansari's mediatory role did not go down well with the pan-Islamists among the *ulama*, who were keen on intensifying the agitation even at the risk of violence. Their spokesman was the firebrand *Sahban-ul-Hind* Maulvi Ahmad Said (1888-1959) of *Madrasa-i-Aminia* who led the local pressure to extremism even before the full development of the **Khilafat** movement. In early 1919, he launched forth a tirade about the difficulties in dealing with the British and upbraided Muslims who were not prepared to die for the Khilafat and who by doing good to the Europeans did harm and evil to their country. He was backed by Qazi Abbas Husain, editor of the *Qaum* and Arif Husain Hasvi, editor of the *Congress*. These papers, along with the *Inquilab*, highlighted government's repression during the *satyagraha* and commended Asaf Ali's suggestion to call the place round the Clock Tower as *Khuni Chauraha* to perpetuate the memory of the Delhi martyrs just as the *Khuni Darwaza* reminded the people of the 1857 revolt.

Ansari had little sympathy with such over-zealous *satyagrahis* and responded to their outburst with commendable firmness. As one committed to non-violence, he was not favourably disposed to prosecuting the *satyagraha* on purely agitational lines. Yet, he was prudent enough not to ventilate his views publicly. He worked quietly, often unobtrusively, to pacify his militant colleagues and warned them of the hazards of violence. When his endeavours came to naught he resigned from the Satyagraha Sabha. Writing to Mohamed Ali, who was still interned in Chhindwara, Ansari questioned the purposefulness and efficacy of the *satyagraha* movement. The



letter, intercepted by the Deputy Commissioner of Chhindwara, illuminates an important facet of Ansari's personality; his ability to take an independent position on political issues and pursue it even if it involved estranging friends and comrades. He wrote:

You must have learnt of my differences of opinion from Shaukat Bhai. Then I was against *Hijrat* (migration) only, but I was entirely in favour of *satyagraha*. In Delhi, I have had ample experience of *satyagraha*. Though on the 30th March I was not in Delhi, but from the 1st of April, to its end whole day and night I spent all my time in observing the movement of *satyagraha* with its result and in allaying the excitement and uneasiness that was then common in the public mind and eventually I came to the conclusion that it was not possible to carry on the *satyagraha* on the principles on which its originator Mahatma Gandhi wishes it to be carried on in the present circumstances. There are many causes for its failure and some of those causes are such that we have, if not absolutely none, very little control over them.

In these circumstances, I consider the *satyagraha* movement to be practically impossible and wholly unprofitable and severed my connection with the Satyagraha Sabha. This is my opinion about Indians generally. Except some selected people I consider Mussalmans generally absolutely unfit to act on the principles of *satyagraha*. In my humble opinion *satyagraha* is an impracticable movement, of course, under the direct supervision of Mahatma Gandhi this movement may perhaps succeed to a certain extent.<sup>11</sup>

Ansari's letter to the organizers of the meeting, held in Delhi on 13 May, to express loyalty to the government in view of the threatened Afghan invasion, and his joining a gathering to thank the authorities for their handling of the situation in April caused quite a flutter, and gave rise to all sorts of speculations. Much was also made out of his resignation from the Satyagraha Sabha. According to one source, he quit because "his views regarding the practicability of the passive resistance movement had changed when he saw excesses to which it led". It was also rumoured that Ansari suggested that the signatories to the vow in Delhi be given an opportunity of saying whether, in the light of the incidents since 7 March, they still wished to be considered *satyagrahis*. "Presumably reckoning on a general recantation," concluded an intelligence report, "the Committee decided instead to abolish the Sabha and proceeded to burn the list of adherents and the papers on which they had signed the vow."<sup>12</sup>

It is easy to discern a slight vacillation in Ansari's disposition, but this should not be construed as 'betrayal', as implicitly suggested in government circles. There was also no sign of a shift in his commitment to the *satyagraha* movement though he demurred at its reckless course in Delhi. There was also no wavering in his devotion to Gandhi as he continued to believe that the movement could still succeed under his 'direct supervision'. Besides, he was genuinely captivated by his personality, his idealism, his concern for the poor and the downtrodden and by his leadership qualities. From now on, the Mahatma was his unquestioned leader; he was to idolize him, follow him and assist him in future political crusades. He enjoyed both his friendship and confidence which at that time was the biggest political asset he could have.



### III

Ansari was not the only Muslim to be influenced by Gandhi; others fell in behind the Mahatma's programme in 1919 without having either worked with him or, in some cases, even having met him. He endeared himself to Ansari's younger colleagues—Shuaib Qureshi and Abdur Rahman Siddiqi—because of the asceticism of his style of life and his moves towards communal unity on the basis of championing specifically Muslim grievances, such as the future of the Khilafat and the Holy Places of Islam. Oddly enough, they looked up to Gandhi for counsel and leadership on this overtly religious issue.

Gandhi had worked with Muslims in South Africa and, after his return to India, forged friendly links with some influential Muslims. He met the Ali Brothers in Aligarh and Delhi in 1915, and early in 1916. His circle of Muslim friends widened after he met Ansari and Abdul Bari;<sup>13</sup> with his vigour, charm and obvious organizational flair, Ansari seemed a suitable ally. The Mahatma tried to see the Ali Brothers in the Chhindwara prison, but was refused permission by the government. But he was unflinching in his resolve to secure their release. When the Viceroy ignored his pleadings, the Mahatma announced his decision to engage the government in a duel.<sup>14</sup> The fight for Mohamed Ali's release, though a 'crushing burden', had to be borne.<sup>15</sup> He went on to assure Bi Amma—Mataji—that he was leaving no stone unturned to secure their quick but perfectly honourable release.

Gandhi attached great significance to his relations with Mohamed Ali because he wanted to secure his collaboration in advancing Hindu-Muslim unity, having made it an essential part of his mission to India. "*My interest in your release*", he



told Mohamed Ali, “*is quite selfish. We have a common goal and I want to utilize your services to the uttermost in order to reach that goal. In the proper solution of Mohammedan question lies the realization of Swaraj*” [emphasis added].<sup>16</sup> Convinced that self-government could only be achieved if Hindus and Muslims worked hand in glove, he tried to secure ‘permanent unity’ between them.<sup>17</sup> The Khilafat issue gave him a unique opportunity of doing so—a chance that would not arise in a hundred years.<sup>18</sup> His inner voice told him that the two communities would stand shoulder to shoulder one day because there was no other course open to them but to be brothers.<sup>19</sup> The Khilafat agitation was “the great churning process of the ocean that India is. Why should we worry as to what will come out (poison or nectar) from the movement? Is it not enough if we are certain that, that activity is pure and righteous.”

Gandhi assumed that Mohamed Ali was a representative of Muslim opinion and therefore an ideal instrument for creating Hindu-Muslim comradeship with the aim of obtaining *Swaraj*. Because to Gandhi *Swaraj* meant not just political Home Rule but a state of communal harmony, Mohamed Ali was valuable to him both as an issue on which to cement an inter-communal combination and also because he thought that he was a splendid example of that mingling of Hindu and Muslim culture which had occurred in UP.<sup>20</sup>

Mohamed Ali reciprocated. He was full of admiration for, and placed his entire confidence in the Mahatma. He subscribed to the non-violent programme against the Rowlatt Act which, in his words, were “enacted in the most tyrannical manner,” ending “the reign of law” and substituting “a reign of terror in its place.”<sup>21</sup> While in Chhindwara, he corresponded with Gandhi regularly, exchanged views on various

theological questions and appreciated his efforts to secure his release.<sup>22</sup> When released from internment at the end of 1919, he promptly reaffirmed his solidarity with Gandhi.

Another important adherent to the Gandhian movement was Abdul Bari, the spiritual preceptor of Ansari and the *Pir* of the Ali Brothers. The Mahatma and the Maulana first met at the Lucknow Congress in December 1916. They saw each other again in February/March 1918 at Ansari's home in Delhi and then in March 1919. As a result of the second meeting, Abdul Bari was persuaded to follow the lead of Gandhi during the *satyagraha*. His motive was simple: the Mahatma was the only guarantor of Congress support to the Khilafat demands. "I have accepted his [Gandhi's] support in getting our aims fulfilled," he wrote in November 1920, "and for that purpose I think it is necessary to follow his advice... *I know that the strength of Islam lies in association with him*" [emphasis added].<sup>23</sup> In appreciation of his espousal of the Khilafat claims and in deference to his wishes (though Gandhi did not make the abandonment of cow-slaughter a condition of his support), Abdul Bari decided not to sacrifice cows in future and appealed to his co-religionists to do the same. To him, as indeed to many others who paid heed to his exhortation, giving up cow-slaughter was a symbolic gesture of camaraderie and goodwill towards the Mahatma who venerated the cow; in the early 1920s, such well-thought-of gestures were important for sustaining the Hindu-Muslim rapprochement. Khwaja Hasan Nizami also favoured such a move. The Prophet Mohammad, he stated, slaughtered a cow only once in his lifetime, that the *Quran* did not enjoin upon the faithful to slaughter cows specially and the same religious, cultural and economic compulsions which prompted Hindus to save the cow must apply to the Muslims as well.<sup>24</sup> He was also



converted to the principles of *satyagraha* and non-violence. “I have decided to adhere to the principles (*tariqa*) laid down by Mahatma Gandhi.”<sup>25</sup>

Muslim artisans, merchants, mill-workers and weavers also rallied round Gandhi and took part in the *hartal* on 6 April. His success in securing their adherence was due to the consummate skill with which he capitalized on the indignation against the government’s policy towards Turkey as well as the fear that the Rowlatt Bills were intended to enable officials to coerce the Muslims and “prevent them from giving trouble so as to facilitate the dismemberment of Turkey.” Secondly, the steadily growing resentment against British domination was fanned by the economic distress flowing from World War I. During and after the War there was a sharp increase in the prices of basic commodities such as rice, wheat, salt and cooking oil. In UP foodgrain production fell sharply because of lack of rain and large areas were hit by famine or scarcity. The province, like other regions of India, was afflicted by the great influenza which caused the death of at least five to six million people. Gandhi’s genius lay in canalizing these discontents into a spectacular movement of popular protest against the Raj.

An equally important feature of the Gandhian *satyagraha* was that it ushered in an unprecedented phase of Hindu-Muslim comradeship. “Though the Rowlatt Act sits like a dread night-mare on our breasts”, wrote the editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, “it has united both Hindus and Mussalmans in a way which has never been witnessed.”<sup>26</sup> There were reports of a *satyagraha* movement in Muzaffarnagar and of meetings to harmonize Hindu-Muslim relations. The Muslims went so far as to allow *chandan* to be put on their forehead and promised to abstain from killing any cows at the next *Id*.<sup>27</sup> The



Commissioner of Banaras division took note of the harmonious spirit and of certain Maulvis of Jaunpur preaching friendship and forfeiting their right to sacrifice cows at the next *Id*.<sup>28</sup> At Delhi this was a common occurrence after the happenings of 30 March. In conformity with the fraternization and unity of purpose, both before and after the *hartal* on 30 March, Shraddhanand was invited to address the Friday congregation at the Juma Masjid. This was followed by *sadhus* addressing from pulpits and Muslim divines addressing mixed audiences in Hindu temples in all parts of the country.

The nationalists were no doubt carried away by such dramatic spectacles of unity and, consequently, tended to simplify the nature of the communal tangle. At the same time, few could deny that a nationalist struggle, free from a sectarian bias, had the potential of embracing many Muslims within its fold. This was later reinforced by the strength of Gandhi's appeal during the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements.

The message was not lost on Ansari who remained committed to the cause of communal amity. Over the years he tried to wean away Muslims from communal bodies and wanted the Congress to avoid Hindu revivalist rhetoric and stay clear of those issues of discord which would alienate Muslims and create fissures in the nationalist movement. The experience of the Rowlatt *satyagraha* convinced him that there were many issues which concerned Hindus and Muslims equally; consequently, there were objective reasons for them to coalesce in advancing the country's interests generally. Unity between the Hindus and the Muslims was therefore not only desirable but a necessary condition for the success of the nationalist movement. It is with this conviction that he decided to devote himself whole-heartedly to cementing their bonds of friendship. This was an hazardous task as Ansari was to

discover soon, but he responded to the challenge with remarkable tenacity and determination.

Up to 1919, Ansari had given convincing proof of his ability as a man of action, as advocate, negotiator and organizer. In the years that followed, he was to reveal other and rarer gifts as a leader and policy-maker which hitherto had not been brought fully into play.

### Notes

- 1 Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 274.
- 2 Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 41.
- 3 Home Poll, A. May 1919, 19-20, NAI.
- 4 C.L. Alexander to W. Raw, 17 April 1919, General Administration Department (GAD), F. No. 262, 1919, Box 131, UPSA.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*; Home Dept, to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi, 20 April 1919, *DIC*, p. 209.
- 7 *DIC*, pp. 201-2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- 11 Home Poll. A., September 1919, 406-28, NAI; Hasan (ed.), *Mohamed Ali in Indian Politics*, Vol. I, pp. 253-4.
- 12 FR, first half of May 1919, Home Poll. Deposit, July 1919, 49, NAI.
- 13 Speech on Khilafat, Bombay, 9 May 1919. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Vol. 15, p. 295.
- 14 Gandhi to Maffey, 12 July 1918, Chelmsford Papers (21).
- 15 11 April 1918, Mahadev Desai (ed.), *Day-To-Day with Gandhi* (Varanasi, 1968), Vol. I, p. 93.
- 16 Gandhi to Mohamed Ali, 18 November 1918, Hasan (ed.), *Mohamed Ali in Indian Politics*, vol. 2, p. 117.
- 17 CWMG, Vol. 15, p. 296.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Day-To-Day with Gandhi*, Vol. 1, p. 56.
- 20 J.M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 152.

- 21 Mohamed Ali to Chelmsford, 24 April 1919, Hasan (ed.), *Mohamed Ali in Indian Politics*, Vol. 2, pp. 232-3.
- 22 For example, Mohamed Ali to Gandhi, 20 February 1919, *ibid.*, pp. 239-41.
- 23 Home Poll. Deposit, 1921, 4, NAI; WRDCI, March 1919, Home Poll. B, April 1919, 148-52, NAI.
- 24 Hasan Nizami, *Tark-i-Gayekushi* (Delhi, 1920), pp. 6-7, 16. Abdul Bari thanked Gandhi for the success of the Day of Prayer and conveyed Maulana Sulaiman of Phulwari's message that the Hindus of the city, acting on Gandhi's instructions, 'have made us so much obliged that we ourselves have determined not to sacrifice cow in future'. Abdul Bari to Gandhi, n.d., Abdul Bari Papers, Firangi Mahal, Lucknow.
- 25 Hasan Nizami, *Government aur Khilafat* (Gurdaspur, 1922 edn.). The pamphlet was first published in 1920.
- 26 M.L. Ghose to Mohamed Ali, 14 April 1919, Hasan (ed.), *Mohamed Ali in Indian Politics*, vol. 2, p. 220.
- 27 P.W. March to W. Raw, 27 April 1919, GAD, F. No. 262, 1919, UPSA.
- 28 Commissioner of Banaras Division to A.C. Chatterji, Chief Secretary to UP Government, 29 April 1919, *ibid.*



## The Khilafat Experience

**H**ISTORIANS have chartered the course and development of the Khilafat ferment in India. The following account is, therefore, limited to an examination of those aspects which place Ansari's role in perspective as well as illuminate some facets of the Khilafat protest in India. The main focus is on Delhi, though the national context is not lost sight of because Ansari's sphere of activity extended far beyond the confines of the capital. Admittedly, he had no regional political base; yet this did not limit his influence. He had a large following in different regions and in different groups and was known to and well thought of by every major politician in the country, including Gandhi who solicited his advice.

It is a lesser known fact that Ansari was the first to voice the growing disquiet over the future of Turkey and the Holy Places from an organized political platform—the All-India Muslim League session in December 1918. He was also the first prominent leader to highlight the pan-Islamic dimension of the Khilafat excitement and established its correlation with the political aspirations of the Indian people at large. He thus attempted to prove that the Khilafat movement was not just organically linked with Indian nationalism, but that its collapse would spell danger to the Congress movement and its ideal of attaining *Swaraj*.

First, he concentrated on the dismemberment of Muslim states because of the 'avarice and greed of the Chancellories of

Europe' and warned that his community would not remain indifferent to the fate of 40 million Muslims in the world. He stressed that the integrity and independence of the present Muslim states be maintained intact, the wrongs done to the Arabs of North Africa and the Tartars and Turks of Central Asia be redressed and they should be given a free chance to choose their own government.

Next he turned to the relationship between the government and the Muslims, describing it as 'one varying from bias against them to that of antipathy, suspicion, mistrust and even dislike', and went on to give forceful expression to the disillusionment, the sense of having been tricked, which Muslims felt from the time of the annulment of Bengal's partition. Now, he pointed out, the Secretary of State and the Viceroy were against separate electorates and communal representation, 'the life and soul of all our activities of the present day'. He also referred to the interference with religious liberty, guaranteed under the Proclamation of 1858, 'the fundamental basis of [Muslim] allegiance to the Crown', the internment of Mahmud Hasan, Azad and the Ali Brothers and the strangulation of newspapers like the *Comrade*, the *Hamdard*, the *Al-Hilal* and the *Zamindar*. Ansari had come to believe, slowly, but with growing conviction, that those who clung to the doctrine of *force majeure* in India advocated an Imperial philosophy whose vigour was already spent and which was no longer a solution for the problems of the day. "Had it not been that our rulers were engaged in a struggle of life and death", he observed, "the Mussalmans would have taken such constitutional measures as would have compelled action."

The rest of the speech was a plea for the burying of mistrust and a new spirit of Hindu-Muslim partnership. Ansari reiterated his faith in the Lucknow Pact, hammered out in



December 1916, and in the making of which he played a major part.<sup>1</sup> On Hindu-Muslim *entente*, ushered in by the pact, he contended:

The Mussalmans have fought the battle of India shoulder to shoulder with their Hindu brethren, their political programme has come in line with that of the Hindus, the Hindu-Muslim rapprochement entered into at Lucknow has, year after year, gained strength and vitality and I believe that as time goes on we shall understand each other better and any causes of friction that remain shall cease to exist. It is my firm conviction that a true Mussalman is always a good Nationalist.

Ansari concluded his speech at the League meeting on the note that the exclusion of India from the application of Woodrow Wilson's (1856-1924) fourteen points was inexcusable in the light of its contributions and sacrifices during the War. It seemed to him a ridiculous paradox that India alone should escape from a movement of political thought that was affecting every other part of the British Empire. Making a strong plea for self-determination, he set forth:

Out of the welter and blood of the Armageddon have emerged certain definite principles on which will be based the foundations of a new and better world... They have been repeated, explained and amplified time after time, until no doubt has been left in the minds of men that their application will be universal and not confined to the geographical limits of a country or continent nor will they be circumscribed by



the prejudices of race, colour or creed. To my mind there is but one single doctrine in which is focussed the entire thought of the whole human race. This doctrine, Gentlemen, is the doctrine of self-determination.

Ansari's address had a profound impression on the Muslim League session, on the political activists in Delhi and on Muslims throughout northern India. Contemporaries took serious cognizance of his articulation of political demands, his avouchment of his community's commitment to the Lucknow Pact and his faith in a viable communal accord. His pronouncement brightened up the prospects of closer Congress-Muslim League cooperation and offered hopes of narrowing down the wide gulf that already yawned between the Hindus and Muslims.

Muslims in northern India paid much heed to Ansari's address as it summed up their fears and frustrations which arose out of British policies both in India and in Turkey. In fact, Ansari's effort to stir them out of their torpor was rewarded by a slow but steady surge of resentment against the government and those who served it. "There is no doubt," reported an intelligence officer, "that the masses were grieved to hear of the Sultan's defeat.. Now Dr Ansari's address with its quotations from the *Quran* and the support of the *ulamas* (sic) is producing anger and hate among them. The address has been widely read and by now every Mussalman knows that the Holy Places are going out of the hands of the Mussalman sovereigns and that the English are responsible."

Fresh from his success at Delhi, Ansari devoted the next three years spreading the Khilafat message. In January 1919, he helped to distribute an *istifta* (questionnaire) issued by

Abdul Bari in order to obtain an authoritative pronouncement from leading *ulama* in support of the views expressed by Ansari at the historic Muslim League gathering. He led the Khilafat delegation which met the Viceroy on 19 January 1920 and was a member of the second deputation which reached London in February 1921. He submitted a report of its activities and suggested that the Central Khilafat Committee depute knowledgeable people to Europe to remain in touch with the situation there as well as with 'Near Eastern Affairs'. In early 1922, Ansari, Ajmal Khan, Seth Chotani (1873-1932), Syed Mahmud (1889-1971) and A.H.S. Khatri issued a fairly comprehensive statement setting out the Khilafat claims. They also laid out a scheme of political activity for their Muslim brethren with emphasis on attainment of *Swaraj* under Gandhi's leadership. This was followed by an Ansari-Ajmal Khan manifesto, issued in March 1922. It demanded the restoration of the Turkish portion of the Ottoman Empire to Turkey with full sovereign rights, the liberation of the Arabic-speaking areas—Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and Hejaz—from non-Muslim control and the maintenance of the Sultan's authority over the Holy Places.

Ansari presided over district, provincial and all-India gatherings enlisting popular support for the Khilafat and the Congress movements. He took the lead in convening the All-India Muslim Conference held in Lucknow on 21 September 1921, persuaded the Muslim divines to attend in large numbers and when the Conference decided to observe 17 October as 'Khilafat Day'—a day of mourning and protest—he ensured its success in Delhi. He was at the head of the Anti-Peace Celebration Committee; the main financier of the innumerable Khilafat Volunteer Corps in the capital and the chief architect of the local Khilafat Committee.



The Delhi Khilafat Committee was established on 5 November 1919 at Ajmal Khan's residence, some months after the Central Khilafat Committee came into being in Bombay. Headed by Ansari, Ajmal Khan and Asaf Ali, it included journalists, *ulama*, lawyers and a few petty traders who had earlier patronized the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*. The *ulama*, who were at the heart of Muslim concern over Turkey, were represented by Maulvis Kifayatullah, Ahmad Said and Nur Muhammad—all of them had played an active part in the Rowlatt *satyagraha*. Among the journalists were Abbas Husain, Arif Husain Hasvi, Abdul Ghaffar and Tajuddin who were also catapulted to the fore during the Rowlatt *satyagraha*.

This unique combination of the Western and the traditionally-educated Muslims helped to turn the once benign Imperial capital into a stormy centre of anti-government and the focus of vigorous Khilafat activities. "The first fortnight of December 1919," reported the government, "has only been remarkable in Delhi on account of the Khilafat agitation and the anti-peace celebration campaigns."<sup>2</sup> In November 1919 the Delhi Khilafat Committee convened and hosted an All-India Khilafat Conference—attended by, among others, Gandhi and Shraddhanand. Its decisions—to boycott the peace celebrations planned by the government for 13 December and to withhold cooperation with the government unless the Khilafat issue was settled in accordance with Muslim wishes—radicalized the course of the Khilafat movement in Delhi and elsewhere. The other resolution which proposed the boycott of British goods did not find favour with Gandhi. His reactions had to be taken into account, for he had come to play an increasingly vital role in Khilafat affairs since his first major pronouncement in May 1919 that the Khilafat question was 'the greatest of all, greater even than that of the repeal of the Rowlatt Act,



for it affects the religious susceptibilities of millions of Muslims'. His view prevailed at the Conference. So the only resolution passed, thanked him and other Hindus for their support and proposed a boycott of peace celebrations.

The extent of Gandhi's influence was also apparent at the Muslim League session in Amritsar in December 1919. In deference to his wishes and as a reciprocal gesture of goodwill towards the Hindus, the League agreed to substitute the slaughter of other animals in place of cows on the occasion of *Baqr Id*. It is noteworthy that Ansari introduced this resolution. Gratitude was also expressed to the Crown for the spirit in which the royal proclamation was issued. Here again Gandhi's influence is noticeable, for he was at the same time carrying a similar motion through the Congress.

From January to March 1920 the Khilafat protest in Delhi, as elsewhere, reached a new level of intensity owing to hectic campaigning by the *ulama* and the Khilafat Volunteer Corps, and the release of Mohamed Ali and Shaukat Ali as a result of the amnesty which accompanied the Royal Proclamation of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The Ali Brothers made their first triumphal entry into Delhi on 9 January. In Ansari's open motor car, they were driven through the main streets of old Delhi decorated with garlands, crescent-emblazoned flags and archways at the various intersections. "Khilafat volunteers" stated, a government report, "turned out for their first mass operations on the occasion of the triumphal arrival in Delhi of the Ali Brothers... They took complete charge of the Chandni Chowk and endeavoured violently but unsuccessfully to control the assembled crowds."

Mohamed Ali returned to the city on 16 January and asked Muslims to sacrifice their 'health, wealth and life in the name of God'. Azad said on the same occasion that the proposed

Khilafat deputation to the Viceroy had no request to make, but would simply inform him of the Islamic obligations.

Ansari accompanied the Ali Brothers on their extensive tours and was wholly behind the drive to implement non-cooperation. On 10 September he spoke at the Gora Bazar in Ghazipur on non-cooperation. Towards the end of the year 1920, he presided over the 13th Muslim League session and dwelt at length on *tark-i-mawalat*, or the abandonment of friendship with those who were enemies of and at war with Islam and Muslim countries. He said that a government could only survive with the active cooperation or passive acquiescence of the people, but if it was unjust and disregarded the rights of the people the only way of reforming it was to cease cooperation. The principle of *tarki-i-mawalat*, he emphasized, was not a new idea; rather it was a clear and definite injunction of the *Shariat* which Muslims had consigned to oblivion. But Gandhi's 'far-sighted mind' saw in this Muslim religious principle an effective method of wide application, well-suited to the political requirements of the country and in conformity with the principles of *satyagraha*. Ansari took the opportunity of reminding his Muslim audience that non-cooperation was not only a political and moral necessity but a religious obligation; hence they had a greater responsibility in carrying it out.

The boycott of government-aided educational institutions, envisaged in the non-cooperation programme, appealed to Ansari a great deal. He accompanied Jawaharlal to Banaras and helped organize a students' non-cooperation committee at the University. He did the same in Allahabad, Aligarh and Agra. At the Muslim League session in 1921 he referred to the substantial and encouraging response of students and made special mention of the 'marvellous patience and fortitude' of



those students who left the Aligarh College to join the National Muslim University, familiarly known as the Jamia Millia Islamia. What was unstated was Ansari's own critical role in founding the institution and nursing it from its very inception. Jamia was Ansari's lifelong passion and he devoted himself to its development. For this reason we must examine its history more closely. We do so for another reason. Jamia's fortunes were inextricably linked with the state of communal relations in the country. It flourished at a time when political unity between the Hindus and Muslims reached its high watermark; it faced the prospect of closure in a less favourable climate.

### **Non-Cooperation at Aligarh and the Foundation of Jamia Millia Islamia**

Addressing a students' gathering at the Ahmedabad on 28 September 1920 Gandhi said:

If [however] all government schools are left empty I promise that you will see the face of India changed within a month. Nothing else will have the same impact on the public and our rulers as that produced by every student leaving his or her school or college forthwith in a day.<sup>3</sup>

This call to national service and self-sacrifice elicited a ready response among diverse types of students; in fact statistics for the boycott of schools and colleges were far more impressive than for boycott of courts or resignation from government service. The Congress Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee noted that the ranks of Congress workers were swelled by 'the more ardent young men whose patriotism



and enthusiasm have greatly advanced the cause of the country.' This was true of among other places, the M.A.O. College at Aligarh where non-cooperation was a spectacular success.

Syed Ahmad's crusade against the Congress also made sense and struck a favourable chord in Aligarh circles. In the early years of the twentieth century, however, this most 'benighted' and conservative of academic centres suddenly exploded into political activity confronting the British with the most serious Muslim movement of dissidence which they had faced since the 1857 revolt. The agitation against the Nagri resolution of 18 April 1900, followed by the students' strike of February 1907, represented extremely new trends in Aligarh politics—a trend to steer the Muslim community on a course different from that plotted by Syed Ahmad Khan. Although this mirrored the changes taking place at other levels of Muslim society, contemporaries were never tired of pointing out how, just a few years before they appeared, there was not the slightest sign of their imminence in Aligarh. This earlier quiescence, attributed to Syed Ahmad Khan's influence and to the predominance of landed interests in the board of trustees, was gradually replaced by a posture favourable to the Congress and antagonistic to government. The Aligarh students threw to the winds all the caution they had learnt at the feet of the grand old man.

There was another trend in Aligarh politics which, though feeble in the early 1920s, came to dominate university life in the early 1930s. This was the influence of socialism. More specifically, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 had a favourable impression on students. Syed Mohammad Tonki, a leading non-cooperator who later turned to 'Islamic socialism' under the influence of Hasrat Mohani, recalled receiving M.N. Roy's

(1887-1954) writings' which discussed the Russian revolution, the reality of the socialist system, and the weakening of big empires as a result of capitalist and imperialist exploitation. He and Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf (1903-62), a Meo Muslim from Alwar State who rose to political eminence in the 1930s, often discussed 'what a socialist system might achieve in India.'<sup>4</sup>

Amidst this flurry of activity, the adoption of the non-cooperation programme in September 1920 offered a rallying point for the radical elements in Aligarh circles. Encouraged by reports of nationalist ebullience on the campus, Gandhi and his Khilafatist allies turned to Aligarh to muster support. Gandhi fired the first shot. He reached Aligarh on 11 October with Ansari, Azad, Ajmal Khan and the Ali Brothers and addressed a students' meeting. He spoke haltingly in Hindustani, trying to find the right words but his accent seemed droll to his 'pseudo-sophisticated' audience who did not agree with him because their political and economic background and affiliations did not predispose them to accept his radically new doctrine of non-cooperation.<sup>5</sup> The first shot had misfired. He then appealed to the trustees: "to decline any further government grant, disaffiliate the great institution of which you are the trustees and reject the charter of the Moslem University. The least that the Aligarh boys can do, if you fail to respond to the call of Islam and India, is to wash their hands clean of an institution acknowledging the aegis of government that has forfeited all title to the allegiance of Islam and India and to bring into being a larger, nobler and purer Aligarh that would carry out the most wishes of its great founder."<sup>6</sup>

The trustees were not impressed either. They had unanimously decided, much before Gandhi's letter of 24 October reached them, to run the institution on 'old established lines'



and 'to make the Mussalmans of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown'. After repeated failures to counter Mohamed Ali's influence who meddled into Aligarh affairs brazenly, the trustees at last had their taste of revenge. The doyen of agitational politics was able to activate only ten members; the remaining 48 present at the meeting rallied round the loyalist Principal, Ziauddin Ahmad (1878-1947), a Cambridge Wrangler who wasted his talents in administration and petty politicking.

Unruffled by this rebuff, Ansari, Azad Subhani (1873-1926), Azad and the Ali Brothers reappeared in Aligarh on 23 October with a small group of students led by Zakir Husain (1897-1969), a student-lecturer in economics, and Ashraf, who had already left college and joined the non-cooperators. On this occasion there was a change of heart among students. K.G. Saiyidain (1904-71) responded, 'together with Zakir Husain, to Gandhi's call to leave educational institutions aided by the foreign government.' "The tumultuous scene at the Students' Union Hall," recalled one of his contemporaries, "dwells vividly in one's memory and the din of acclaim that greeted Dr Saiyidain(s) gesture rings in one's ears to this day."<sup>7</sup> One Nurul Hasan of Azamgarh was so enthralled by the speeches of Azad and Azad Subhani that he joined the growing number of non-cooperators. Amidst fiery and passionate speeches, resolutions, promises and assurances, many more students responded—estimates range from 200 to 700—to the call of non-cooperation and enrolled themselves with the newly-founded Jamia Millia Islamia. Mohamed Ali thus scored a major victory; the college authorities were humbled. The pan-Islamic fervour, combined with the nationalist tide, swept the campus and Syed Ahmad Khan's vision of sustaining the Anglo-Muslim combination through the M.A.O. College was all but shattered.



Carried on the crest of the nationalist tide, the Jamia Millia Islamia was founded in Aligarh in those days of 'unlimited dreams, fervent determination and enthusiastic nationalism.' At the opening ceremony (29 October 1920) performed by that consistent anti-imperialist *alim* of Deoband, Mahmud Hasan [his address was read in his absence], it was explained that Jamia's *raison d'être* was to keep Muslim education free from external control so that "we may be perfectly immune from pernicious alien influences in our ideas and beliefs, our morals and actions, our character and conduct." Consequently, it was to remain independent of government aid and control and evolve a philosophy of education which would be in keeping with national characteristics and in consonance with the Islamic spirit. The founders of Jamia believed that communal peace and religious understanding were the fruit of true education and sought by their course of study to end religious discord between all faiths, while teaching students to be good Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Halide Edib observed in 1935 that Jamia's general aim was to create a harmonious nationhood without Muslims losing their Islamic identity and that in its aim, if not always in its procedure, it was nearer to the Gandhian movement than any other Muslim institution she had come across.<sup>9</sup> Ansari presided over the destiny of such an institution until his death in 1936.

A noticeable, though hitherto unknown, contribution of the architects of Jamia was to familiarize the youth with their own cultural heritage without rejecting what was true and useful in the culture of others and to evolve an organic synthesis of traditional and modern education. In this way they hoped to create both a good Muslim in the traditional sense and a good citizen of an independent India. Recalled Mohammed Mujeeb, one of Jamia's prized acquisitions in 1926: "We agreed that

Muslim or non-Muslim, our student should learn to represent the values of his religion, of his moral and cultural tradition, that he should make himself a useful citizen by being cultured, modest, thoughtful and competent. The forms in which these qualities were to express themselves were those of the Indo-Muslim culture of the 19th and 20th century. This was the common culture of the region.”<sup>10</sup>

This was consistent with the spirit of the Khilafat and non-cooperation days. Gandhi, one of Jamia’s chief benefactors, went a step further. He hoped that it would interpret Muslim culture in a manner consonant with truth and the requirements of a people, diverse in culture, striving to achieve political unity, and that Jamia would produce good Muslims who would be men of refinement and character living according to the highest moral standards and serving the people with devotion and sincerity.<sup>11</sup>

Jamia was also expected to be a Muslim stronghold of the national movement and its cultural and educational ethos was to reflect the composite and integrated development of Indian society. The *Nation* of Lahore opined on 11 February 1925: “Al-Azhar in Egypt was the birth place of Egyptian nationalism and is today the sternest opponent of all that Lord Allenby stands for and we trust and believe that the National Muslim University at Aligarh...will prove to be the Al-Azhar of India.”

Such expectations were adequately fulfilled: Jamia developed as an antithesis of the Aligarh Muslim University in the domain of politics. Its students and teachers went around the country spreading the gospel of Gandhi during the non-cooperation days and urged their limited band of followers to popularize the constructive programme, outlined in the Bardoli resolution. According to the *Swarajya* of Madras, Jamia



trained more than 200 propagandists to keep alive the torch of national idealism. Even afterwards, Jamia stood by the Congress and steadfastly opposed the polemical two-nation theory. And when Delhi was torn by communal strife in 1946-48, it remained one of the few islands of peace and sanity. In November 1946 the Vice-Chancellor, Zakir Husain, addressing an unusual gathering of Congress and Muslim League leaders, spoke of the fire of mutual hatred which was ablaze in the country and pleaded with them to put their heads together and extinguish the fire. "This is not the time," he said, "to investigate and determine as to who lighted the fire, how it was lighted"... "The fire is blazing; it has to be put out."

Devotion to lofty ideals was not enough to keep an institution going for long. Dependent on public subscriptions, Jamia managed its affairs in the initial spate of enthusiasm. But its existence was in jeopardy soon thereafter. Many students, drawn in the expectation of a political revolution or bright career prospects, drifted elsewhere; some staff members also deserted, thinking that they had performed their proper share of national service. "With the receding tide," observed the *Comrade* of 7 August 1925, "the little bark was grounded into the shifting sands of ephemeral politics. Tossed now here, now there, it knew not where it was drifting. The helmsman stood aghast not knowing whether it was wise to flee from his post or to stick on where he was and painfully watch the slow but seemingly sure wreck of his little ship."

The College also suffered owing to the neglect of its first Principal, Mohamed Ali. Jamia was too small a place for the fulfilment of his political ambitions. With his eyes fixed on Aligarh he was of the view that it had outlived its usefulness. He became increasingly averse to Jamia's nationalist orientation as he gradually developed narrow communitarian concerns.



Jamia's existence was, in actual fact, threatened by acute paucity of funds. Though initially propped up by public contributions and by a monthly grant from the Central Khilafat Committee, these sources gradually dried up and Jamia was hard-pressed to pay salaries to its teachers and provide the minimum of facilities to the 225 students in 1923. Yet the enthusiasm of a group of diehards was not dampened. Determined to make Jamia an example and an inspiration in educational renaissance they were out to convince themselves as well as others that they were part of a free national establishment and the symbol of a novel experiment in education.

Sometime during 1925 Ansari and Ajmal Khan, while in Europe, prevailed on three brilliant students in Germany—Zakir Husain, Abid Husain (1896-1978) and Mujeeb—to join the teaching faculty.

Back home a group of selfless teachers, led by Shafiqur Rahman Kidwai (1901-1953), A.G. Kellat (1871-1971), Aslam Jairajpuri (1882-1955), Hafiz Fayyaz Ahmad (1897-1964), Saeed Ansari (1904-1984) and Irshadul Haq (1901-1974) signed a pledge to serve Jamia for at least twenty years on a monthly salary of not more than Rs. 150. They did not have money and worked amidst and through poverty. They did not even have the shelter of houses; so they pegged away in tents and under the open sky. Yet they cheerfully faced the hard trails 'in an atmosphere of freedom, enthusiasm and an indestructible optimism' setting high standards of idealism, self-sacrifice and devotion. Zakir Husain remembered those years of deprivation as 'days of joy'. "There was a longing to build," he said, "and nothing to build with. There were no resources, only the will to achieve. In the eyes of every child who came to us we saw the image of freedom. Every child

seemed to give us all that we had been deprived of by political enslavement.’’ Some financial assistance came from outside, but it was not enough. In January 1928 Gandhi gave assurances of putting Jamia on a sound financial basis, and lent his name to a fund drive in memory of Ajmal Khan and for putting Jamia on a firm footing. For the purpose, he wanted to draw a ‘substantial amount’ from G.D. Birla’s (1894-1984) ‘gift’ of Rs. 75, 000.

In its years of grinding poverty, Ansari was Jamia’s saviour. Succeeding Ajmal Khan as *Amir-i-Jamia* (Chancellor), he devoted many years to its development. He led a delegation to raise funds in March 1923, desired part of the Khilafat funds to be diverted to Jamia, and made a passionate plea for rescuing Jamia from a serious financial crisis at the Gaya Khilafat Conference the same year. But the response was far from encouraging. The Aga Khan, a patron of the Aligarh College, offered a modest annual grant of Rs. 1,200; Jamnalal Bajaj (1889-1942) donated Rs. 10,000; Birla gave Rs. 50,000, others merely conveyed their best wishes. The nawabs and taluqdars of UP, who were otherwise the main benefactors of some Muslim educational centres, were not keen on helping a Congress-backed institution. Aiding it was a risk they could ill-afford. Other affluent groups, on the other hand, considered Jamia an improvised rival to the more established University at Aligarh. They pinned their hopes on the ‘Muslim Oxford’ at Aligarh where a degree could still be a passport to government service. Jamia merely deserved respect rather than recognition.

Ignored by the Muslims and only marginally backed by the Congress, Jamia was again confronted with the prospect of closure in the early 1930s. Yet Ansari did not despair. He was a doer. Instead of worrying he worked. Nothing was more characteristic of him than his tenacity, the refusal to let go of a



problem until he could hit on a way of solving it. With a begging bowl he went around the country collecting funds and explained the importance of his mission. He possessed prodigious energy and spent it prodigally as if he knew he would not be there long. In May 1933, he wrote to Abdul Majid Khwaja, Principal of the Jamia College, in a state of anguish:

You are fully aware of the tremendous difficulties and the untold hardships which the Jamia has gone through since 1930 after my going to jail. The Hyderabad grant which was just about to be started was stopped and the grant from Bhopal was also stopped.... You can imagine in the absence of even the meagre allowances given to the teachers of Jamia how poor and destitute and half-starved they must be. It is really pitiable to see their plight and yet like brave fellows, they are going on. Now, however, there is a chance of re-starting both the Hyderabad and Bhopal grants if only we would put in all our best efforts.<sup>12</sup>

Ansari's efforts bore fruit; generous donations poured in from Bhopal, Hyderabad, Rampur and Madras, more in response to Ansari's appeal than in recognition of Jamia's importance. Ansari was now in a position to strengthen Jamia's educational programmes, organize lectures of leading Indian educationists and invite outstanding representatives from Turkey to 'promote cultural friendship and understanding between different peoples and to keep Indians actively interested in great movements of the outside world.' Though he never pretended to be an intellectual, he respected men of intellect, whatever their backgrounds and knew how to make the best use of their brains. Thus Rauf Bey, the Turkish soldier and statesman, Dr Behdgt Wahby, the scientist, and Halide



Edib, the educationist, novelist and historian of the national revival in Turkey, came at Ansari's invitation to deliver lectures at Jamia. Edib, whom Ansari met at Constantinople in 1913, impressed most. Her eight lectures, delivered in January-February 1935, had a marked impact on her audience. Ansari extolled her virtues as a novelist, a social philosopher and an educationist. He continued:

She has worn military uniforms and served at the headquarters of the nationalist army, with the din and the smoke of a grim battle around her. She has also been a rebel against customs and traditions that fettered life ... she has loved and served her people, but with a large heartedness that could look beyond them to the greater human family; she has thrown herself heart and soul into the struggle of her nation for life and liberty, but never ceased to be aware of the world-wide moral and cultural conflicts of which it formed a part. She speaks, therefore, with greater authority than any person living on the fundamental problems on whose solution will depend the future of the East.<sup>13</sup>

This adulatory note offers clues to Ansari's own commitment to certain ideals which he appreciated most in the personality of Edib. Very often what people admire in others, reflects their own world view, their own set of values and their desire to emulate what they appreciate in their heroes.

It is easy to explain Ansari's abiding interest in Jamia, though it is hard to understand its absence in others close to him. Ansari's devotion was, in the main, due to his attachment to Jamia's secular and composite ideology. He was keen to keep it going as a living symbol of the Khilafat and non-cooperation days and the high points of both the anti-colonial struggle and Hindu-Muslim fraternization. To him the College

was much more than an experiment in basic education; it represented the national urge of a section of Muslim intelligentsia to participate in the larger educational and political processes of the country and contribute to the intellectual awakening of the less privileged sections of society. Its steady decline was disconcerting because it jeopardized Ansari's plan of building a model Muslim educational centre which would be a hub of nationalist activities and serve his ideal of promoting Hindu-Muslim integration.

Ansari's efforts were not wasted. Much of his work has proved enduring. Jamia survives in Delhi and remains true to at least some of the goals set by its benefactors. Led by Zakir Husain and ably aided by his two comrades—Mujeeb and Abid Husain—it chartered a course which was consistent with Ansari's vision. In the 1930s and the 1940s, they accepted Gandhi's guidance in working for an institution entirely free of British control, accepted him as their leader and guide in politics and promoted his constructive programme without being lured by office, power and authority. And when Delhi was tormented by bloody communal riots, Jamia teachers and students organized relief for the victims and helped heal the communal wounds. Ansari had done the same during his eventful public life; his successors at Jamia followed the example set by their chief benefactor. This was truly an apt tribute to his memory.

## NOTES

1. The pact was concluded between the representatives of the Congress and the Muslim League. The Congress agreed to separate electorates, to the principle of Muslim representation in the Legislative Councils and to weightage of seats to Muslims in excess of their proportion of the population in areas where they were in a minority.
2. Home Poll. D. January 1920, 44, *NAI*.



3. CWMG, Vol. 18, pp. 297, 280.
4. Syed Mohammad Tonki, in Horst Kruger (ed.), *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf: An Indian Scholar and Revolutionary 1903-1962* (Berlin, 1966), p. 344.
5. This is based on K.G. Saiyidain's memory of Gandhi's visit. He came into personal contact with the Mahatma in 1937 at the First National Education Conference in Sevagram. See *Gandhian Ideas on Education: Their Relevance to our Times* (New Delhi, n.d.), pp. 6-7.
6. CWMG, Vol. 18, p. 369.
7. S. Bashiruddin, 'Dr K.G. Saiyidain: An Appraisal of Personality and Ideals' and K.A. Abbas, 'Thanks, Bhaijan!', in S. Abid Husain, Abdur Rashid (eds.), *Commemoration Volume* (Delhi, n.d.), pp. 45, 65. Referring to the speech made by Saiyidain on the occasion, his brother Khwaja Ahmad Abbas recalled: "The impact of that speech must have left a deep impression on my sub-conscious because since then, even as a boy, I could not be swayed by the passion-filled arguments of the communalists. If the secular and humanistic concept of life has remained an integral part of my own personal credo, I owe it first of all to that speech." Also, K.A. Abbas, *I am not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 50-51.
8. Zakir Husain, quoted in Abid Raza Bedar, *Mata-i-Faqir* (Delhi, 1969); Sheil McDonough, 'The Spirit of the Jamia Millia Islamia as exemplified in the writings of S. Abid Husain', R.D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India* (Delhi, 1981); Freeland Abbot, *Islam and Pakistan* (New York, 1968), pp. 135-6, 145.
9. Edib, *Inside India*, p. 95.
10. *The Jamia College: Its History and significance* (Delhi, n.d.), p. 7.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. As its first *Amir-i-Jamia*, Ajmal Khan wanted the students to know each other's culture: 'the firm foundation of a united Indian nationhood depends on this mutual understanding.' Cited in Metcalf. *op.cit.*, p. 25.
12. Ansari to Khwaja, 2 May 1933, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 138.
13. *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, p. iii.



## The Healing Touch

THE year 1921 was one of feverish political activity. The non-cooperation campaign, launched under the aegis of the Congress-Khilafat Committee combine, generated unprecedented enthusiasm in most parts of the country. In the joyful din of bold and determined opposition to government, the forces of unity and cohesion acquired much strength, a fact which enabled the non-cooperators to achieve greater support for their campaign. But, by the end of 1922, this powerful and unique anti-colonial struggle showed signs of petering out. The suspension of civil disobedience in February 1922, followed by widespread Hindu-Muslim riots, destroyed the edifice of communal unity built in the aftermath of the Lucknow Pact of December 1916. The over-inflated bubble of popular expectation suddenly burst and the disappointment was as overwhelming as the previous exaggerated optimism. "Complete Hindu-Muslim unity which ought to have been a settled fact today," lamented Ansari in September 1923, "is conspicuous by its absence. Years of hard work in various fields have failed not only to make unity a permanent and solid factor of civil life but even to check the present recrudescence of communal discord, the neglected disease which now threatens the very existence of Indian nationalism."<sup>1</sup>

In 1923-24, the communal holocaust swept through many parts of northern India. When C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru,

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Ajmal Khan visited the Punjab in March 1923, they found the situation there virtually beyond hope. They noticed that the relations between the two communities, both educated and uneducated, were so greatly strained that each community had practically arrayed itself in an armed camp against the other. Trouble had blown up again at Multan during *Muharram* in April 1923 as a sequel to a violent outburst a year earlier. The citizens of Panipat experienced a riot in July and those of Amritsar in April and May. “It was a cruel irony of fate,” wrote the *Servant of India*, “that the fourth anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh, where four years ago common aspiration and common sufferings brought the Hindus and Mussalmans closer together than ever before, Amritsar should have witnessed a serious Hindu-Muslim riot and that British soldiers should have been called in to protect members of each community against the hooligans of the other.” Delhi, the home of two well known apostles of Hindu-Muslim unity—Ansari and Ajmal Khan—was also plunged into scenes of bloodshed and strife on 11-12 July 1924. On 9-10 September a major outbreak took place at Kohat in the North-West Frontier Province.

Gandhi reacted to these and other communal conflagrations by going on a 21-day fast on 18 September 1924. But his efforts to induce his countrymen to work together once more yielded no results. The Congress, too, tried to arrest the trend towards violence. Meetings were held to draw up plans to renew the Hindu-Muslim *entente* and pious resolutions on communal harmony were proposed and adopted even by those who were not entirely unstained by communal blots.

The first of such meetings was the special Congress session, held at Delhi in September 1923, hosted by Ansari and



presided over by Azad. The outcome was the formation of a committee, with Ansari and Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) as its members, to prepare a draft of a 'National Pact'. These two individuals, representing two very different strands in the nationalist movement and united only by common loyalty to the Congress, set out to do so. What follows, then, is an analysis of 'The Indian National Pact', Ansari's part in its making and the result of his early initiatives to resolve the communal deadlock. Also analysed is his role in Indian Muslim and Congress politics in the aftermath of a momentous development—the abolition of the Khilafat. His reactions and responses are located in the broad context of developments taking place in India and in the Islamic world, especially in Turkey.

Attainment of complete *Swaraj*, establishment of a federal and democratic government and full religious liberty—of belief, worship, propaganda, association and education—were some of the features of the draft pact prepared by Ansari and Lajpat Rai. Provision was also made for joint electorates with reservation of seats for the minorities in proportion to their population in the constituencies. On three major issues of communal discord, namely, cow-slaughter, the playing of music before mosques and the route of religious processions, it was proposed that Muslims give up cow-slaughter except on the occasion of *Baqr Id*, that music in front of places of public worship be forbidden and the route and time of religious processions, in case of dispute, be determined by local mixed conciliatory boards.<sup>2</sup>

In marked contrast to these provisions—many of which formed part of the 1916 Congress-Muslim League scheme—C.R. Das, with a generosity that seemed extravagant, made large promises to the Muslims in Bengal. While Ansari



and Lajpat Rai proposed communal representation in the Legislatures alone, C.R. Das extended it to local bodies and appointments to government posts. C.R. Das' terms relating to cow-slaughter and music before mosques were also more favourable to Muslims.

The draft submitted by Ansari and Lajpat Rai was 'eclipsed' by the bitter and acrimonious debate generated by the Bengal Pact. 'Public view' was so 'befogged', lamented its authors, that the draft failed to evoke the balanced appraisal it deserved. In general, provincial and local Congress Committees were averse to it and took strong exception to the clauses relating to cow-slaughter and communal representation. Muslim organizations, such as the Khilafat Committees at Gujranwala and Sialkot in the Punjab and Noakhali and Calcutta in Bengal, regarded the Pact as an infringement of their political, religious and economic interests.<sup>3</sup> The Punjab Muslim League produced its own 'pact',<sup>4</sup> while the All India Muslim League, the Khilafat Conference and the *Jamiyat-al-ulama* preferred the Bengal Pact.<sup>5</sup> "The Mussalmans," observed Ansari and Lajpat Rai in their report submitted to the AICC, "have been quite needlessly alarmed by some of its provisions and have allowed their judgements to be influenced by passing events."<sup>6</sup> What they failed to point out was that the vested interests among Muslims, especially the beneficiaries of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, were not prepared to accept anything short of what was conceded to them in the Act of 1919. Besides, given the history of the Congress' political understanding with the Muslim League on the basis of separate electorates, weightage and communal representation, a political 'settlement' was only possible within a self-perpetuating communal framework. In effect, therefore, the Ansari-Lajpat pact could neither satisfy the political aspira-

tions of the dominant Muslim groups nor contain the vociferous Hindu opponents of communal representation. Likewise, suggestions relating to local religious disputes lapsed into insignificance. In consequence, the divide over cow-slaughter, music before mosques and the route of religious processions persisted, causing incalculable damage to Hindu-Muslim relations.

The “Unity Conference” held in Delhi on 26 September 1924 was convened by Ansari, Ajmal Khan and Mohamed Ali in order to “decide immediately what we can do in these 21 days to retrieve the situation and relieve the Mahatma’s agony of distress.” But after all the ballyhoo things ran their course much as they did before. “Some pious resolutions were passed, but the basic malady”, as Jawaharlal retrospectively observed, “could not be cured by conferences. A solution could not be reached by a majority of votes but by virtual unanimity and there were always ‘extremists’ of various groups present whose idea of a solution was a complete submission of all others to their views.<sup>7</sup> The smiles and handclaps of Delhi faded ingloriously into oblivion.”

In November of the same year Gandhi initiated discussions to tackle the Hindu-Muslim problem despite the hemming and hawing of the hard-liners. This led to a conference at Delhi on 23 January 1925. He suggested the formation of a sub-committee which would move on beyond the propagandistic mudslinging and the barren exercises of the past few years. But Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946), Lajpat Rai and Shraddhanand were not willing to oblige. And when the committee was eventually formed at the instance of Jawaharlal and Annie Besant, its deliberations were marred by mutual bickerings, with Gandhi being accused of partiality towards the Muslims in conducting the proceedings. Trouble started



when Lajpat Rai took the line that the sub-committee's decisions would remain tentative without the Hindu Mahasabha's acquiescence. Reference was also made to a 'Muslim conspiracy' for bringing about an invasion of India. All this was disconcerting to Ansari, who played a leading part in the conference. 'His own feeling was one of utter disgust so much so that he felt like retiring from public life altogether.'<sup>8</sup>

The meeting was adjourned on 28 January: Motilal Nehru announced, "we were not able to reach final conclusions." When the committee reassembled in February-March, it accomplished nothing; if anything, bitterness between the participants increased. "The All-Parties Conference, its committees and sub-committees," wrote a distraught Jawaharlal in February, "have not been a success so far. The discussions were painful to listen to. I am afraid the time has not yet come for an agreement which satisfies all parties."<sup>9</sup> The final session on 1 March was attended by only fourteen of the fifty-three members of the committee, including Gandhi, the Nehrus, the Ali Brothers, Jinnah, Shraddhanand, Mohammad Yaqub (1879-1942) of Moradabad and N.C. Kelkar (1872-1947). If Ansari had been more experienced and less enthusiastic, he might have realized that there was very little that he—or, for that matter, Gandhi and Motilal could do to rescue the Conference from being wrecked. Neither side felt there was much chance of achieving an agreement but each thought, for different reasons, that they ought to go through the motions of trying.

The failure of the January conference, together with the growing incidents of riots, led Gandhi to declare that he saw no daylight out of the impenetrable darkness. Later, he admitted his own imperfection as an instrument for bringing



about communal peace, and in despair said: "I have learnt more and more to resign myself utterly to His grace." Such a frank admission by the country's most consistent proponent of Hindu-Muslim amity augured ill for the unity of a nation in the making.

The 'Indian National Pact', the Unity conclaves and the All-Parties Conference revealed Congress' strategy in relation to the communal problem: to reach a political accord with 'leading representatives' and 'influential persons' of the Muslim community for immediate political gains. "The idea of a National Pact," wrote the *Young India* of 3 January 1924, "is sound and from a purely political point of view necessary." "Precedents in pact making" it continued, "for the protection of sectional interests may be lacking, but that fact need not bother us." The communal issue was thus much too frequently considered from the standpoint of the early attainment of *Swaraj* rather than that of nation-building and there was a far greater desire to work for a patch-up unity than to work towards a long-term and enduring solution. The flurry of stop-gap measures were never bolstered by carefully calibrated long term policies. Centrality was accorded to 'Unity' and 'All-Parties' gatherings and much effort went in the drawing up of manifestos. Declarations and resolutions, directed less to the reconciliation of rival policies than to the maintenance of an outward unity on some working formula of compromise. Devoid of any ideological content and lacking in the appreciation of the complex nature of the communal phenomena, such endeavours came to naught in reconciling the conflicting claims of various groups and in furthering Congress' objective of developing a united and powerful nationalist movement. "The want of clear ideals and objectives in our struggle for freedom," commented Jawaharlal, "undoubtedly helped the

spread of communalism’’<sup>10</sup>

Ansari did not think differently. He pinned his hopes on an enduring political accommodation with Muslim groups which, he optimistically believed, would help to reduce communal acrimony. On the basis of his presence in and association with the ‘Unity’ and ‘All-Parties’ gatherings it is possible to argue that his perspective on the communal question in the 1920s was akin to many of his leading Congress comrades. He, too, saw its resolution in terms of political accommodation and adjustment with representatives of various Muslim groups. A detailed appraisal of his attitude is attempted in the following chapters.

## II

Events in Turkey, meanwhile, went their own way. In August and September of 1922, Mustafa Kamal (1880-1938) routed the Greeks, completed the reconquest of Anatolia and wrested a new treaty from the European powers which established complete and undivided Turkish sovereignty in almost all the territory included in the present-day Turkish Republic. Indian Muslims were jubilant. ‘‘Muslims throughout the country,’’ noted the Viceroy, ‘‘have been profoundly stirred and much pleased by the news of the Kamalist victories.’’<sup>11</sup> Buoyed up by optimistic misinformation about the situation in Turkey, they failed to see the implications of the Grand National Assembly’s momentous decision, adopted on 1 November 1922, to separate the offices of Sultan and Khalifa, divesting the latter of his temporal powers and making him into a symbolic pontiff without even the aura of nominal suzerainty. The general disposition in India was to view deposition with equanimity and to believe in Mustafa Kamal as a proud



saviour of his country and champion of Islam. A manifesto issued by Ansari and Ajmal Khan stated that the selection of a new Khalifa by the Turkish National Assembly was a return to the great tradition of elected Khalifas, which would strengthen and not weaken his hands. As President of the Khilafat Conference held in December 1922, Ansari argued that the Turks had not really separated the Khalifa's spiritual and temporal powers, but had only made the Sultan a constitutional monarch. The Khilafat Conference expressed pleasure at the restoration of the ancient practice of electing the Khalifa. Mustafa Kamal was given the title of *Saif-al-Islam* (The Sword of Islam), a term used in the past for conquering sultans.

In the meantime, Ameer Ali (1849-1928), a Shia with close links with the government and the Aga Khan, leader of the Ismaili community, wrote to Turkey's Prime Minister, Ismet Pasha, inviting his attention to the "very disturbing effects the present uncertain position of the Khalifa-Imam is exercising among the vast populations who belong to the Sunni communion." They felt that any diminution in the prestige of the Khalifa or his elimination as a religious factor from the Turkish body politic would mean the disintegration of Islam and its practical disappearance as a moral force in the world; so they emphasized the "imminent necessity for maintaining the religious and moral solidarity of Islam by placing the Khalifa-Imamate on a basis which would command the confidence and esteem of the Moslem nations and thus impart to the Turkish state unique strength and dignity."

This letter alarmed the Turkish Government; it was actually insinuated at Angora—though not officially—that Ameer Ali and the Aga Khan had acted at the instigation of the British Government. The fateful letter, according to some historians,



influenced and possibly precipitated the decision to do away with the Khilafat. Any serious explanation, however, must take into account the fact that Mustafa Kamal realized that as long as the traditional foundations remained intact and their symbol, the Khalifa, maintained his position, it would be difficult to establish a modern national state and Turkish nation. The Khalifa, still supported by a group of loyal followers, was ready to take part with any strong power to turn against his own people and render the idea of a modern republic meaningless. His presence was a disturbing factor in the foreign and internal political union of Turkey and a constant source of 'strife and duplicity'. "There had been cruel and corrupt Sultans in Turkey," wrote Halide Edib, "there had been imbeciles and drunkards in its history, but never before had a son of Osman fallen so low as to maneuver (sic) for the subjugation of Turkey so that he might live comfortably."<sup>12</sup>

After a preliminary preparation the Khilafat was abolished on 3 March 1924. This was followed by the closure of the Ministry of *Shariat* and of the religious courts and by unification of the judicial system. Traditional institutions which had governed society and government for centuries were liquidated and the way was opened to a new mode of life.

The Indian Muslims had another surprise in store. Two days after the trauma of seeing the Khilafat disappear, the pretentious Hāshemite ruler of the Hejaz, King (formerly Sharif) Husain, proclaimed himself Khalifa. With the exception of Abdul Bari, leading Khilafatists in general rejected his claim because he was an Imperial stooge and a traitor to the Turks and, therefore, to pan-Islamic solidarity. Then, in late 1924, Abdul Aziz Saud, the Wahabi chieftain of Nejd, attacked the

Hejaz, captured Mecca and Medina and destroyed a number of tombs and shrines in the holy cities. This caused a split in the Khilafat party with Abdul Bari and other leading *ulama* supporting the Hashemite claim and denouncing the Wahabi ruler for his 'profanity', his religious insensitivity and his territorial aggrandizement. Mohamed Ali, on the other hand, favoured negotiations with Saud, regarding him as a helpful coadjutor in realizing his own ultimate goal—resuscitation of the Khilafat. The two most important factions, headed by the *pir* Abdul Bari and his *murid* Mohamed Ali reached a parting of ways. This was symbolic of the disintegration of the alliance between the religious and the political wings of the Khilafat party.

Efforts to recreate the Khilafat of the classical theorists misfired because Turkey had rejected pan-Islamism and because Muslims in other countries were busy establishing national states independent of external ties of domination: Mustafa Kamal emerged as the symbol of Turkish nationalism, Zaghlul Pasha as the spearhead of the emerging national consciousness of Egypt and the King of Hejaz as the rallying centre of so many Arab aspirations. The Khilafat leadership in India, however, remained ignorant of the potent force of Arab nationalism and the widespread enthusiasm and idealism which expressed itself in movements to eliminate completely Anglo-French domination and attain unconditional independence. The 'Muslim World' which was a relatively closely woven whole during the pre-War days was no longer the same and territorial nationalism, clamant race movements and socialist ferments worked as solvents in the blood of pan-Islamic unity. But the Khilafat leaders in India clung to the symbol of Islamic solidarity—the Khalifa—knowing full well that he was thoroughly discredited in the eyes of most Turks



because he had used his religious powers to stamp out the nationalist movement and thus sanctioned indirectly the foreign occupation of Turkey in violation of his basic religious obligation to defend the community against outside invaders. They also failed to recognize that the Khilafat was too remote and exalted an institution to mean much to, say, an average Anatolian peasant. That is why the Turks allowed an age-old institution to disappear with utter calm and indifference.

Even so, the Khilafat agitation in the subcontinent showed no signs of having run its course. Its protagonists continued to believe that the institution they were trying to defend was 'with all its weaknesses, anti-Islamic trends and digression into pure imperialism... had served as a symbol of Muslim political unity and a powerful inspiration for the Muslim mind in India to retain its international character'.<sup>13</sup> There was a feeling of despondent bewilderment mingled with indignation towards the National Assembly whose drastic action weakened and isolated the one state on whose revival high hopes were set. It was mournfully recorded that an institution hallowed with traditions of thirteen centuries passed away 'as if in a twinkling of an eye' and the 'edifice which looked as firm as a rock and promised to last as long as the world would last, was swept away by the flood of phenomena'.<sup>14</sup>

In marked contrast with the boisterous elation of the closing months of 1922, when, on the morrow of the Kamalist military successes, no voice was raised, whatever misgivings were secretly felt, to challenge the abolition of the Sultanate and its inevitable sequel—the expulsion of the Khalifa from Turkey—the reforms introduced by the Angora Assembly were now regarded as a calculated system of 'moral disintegration'. Mustafa Kamal, a name to conjure with twelve months ago, was in 1924 an 'Unbeliever' and a 'Salonica



Renegade'. It seemed, after all, that Mustafa Kamal was not the idol which he was represented to be and that the ideal of pan-Islamism did not appeal to him so much as to his co-religionists in India. Shaukat Ali was bluntly told by Ismet Pasha that his government's action was a purely domestic concern of the Turkish people, for whom the Khilafat had been a cause of embarrassment and trouble in both internal affairs and foreign relations.

Mustafa Kamal's decision to burst the Khilafat bubble had a profound impact on the alliances forged on the Khilafat issue and sustained by an intense anti-government mood. The rapprochement between various Muslim groups, in particular, came to a steady end in the absence of a sound basis for permanent adjustment of diversified and, in some cases, conflicting interests. Once the Khilafat euphoria had worn thin, the inherent contradictions in the hastily concluded alliances and the dissensions in the Khilafat leadership, which were so far kept under control, came to the fore. Clearly, Islam served as a focal point of unity in the face of a commonly perceived danger, but its utility in sustaining it in the absence of a religious cause was limited. Once the Khilafat issue lost its relevance, a wide range of material and political interests gained primacy over pan-Islamic considerations. From now on, the main thrust of Muslim organizations was to promote those interests, a fact which contributed to the growth of both inter-community and intra-community antagonisms.

The collapse of the Khilafat movement affected the Muslim divines most. Rebuffed and ignored by their comrades on the issue of council entry and continuing civil disobedience, they now found themselves isolated, confused and even inactive. The Khilafat agitation provided the *ulama* with distinct enemy and goals; when the enemy and goals proved elusive other

whipping boys and solutions had to be found. Much of their concerns, geared to religious goals, remained, because they seemed to be the hope of the Muslim community. In consequence, many of them reverted to their former religious preoccupations. The *Jamiyat-al-ulama*, despite its nationalist sympathies, moved along a course parallel to that of the Congress Muslims political leadership: its chief obsession was to secure safeguards against interference with the *Shariat* and guarantees for its propagation and implementation. In 1940, however, a section of the *Jamiyat* became the nucleus of various nationalist organizations. The Congress, which was otherwise vociferous about the secularization of politics, was ever ready to exploit this reserve of influence to counteract the Muslim League.<sup>15</sup>

The doyen of the group estranged from the Congress was Mohamed Ali who faced the inescapable dilemma of either operating within the framework of the Congress organization, as was the case during the Khilafat agitation, or relying upon existing Muslim bodies as instruments for advancing the commonly perceived 'Muslim interests'. The resurgence of communal violence and the squabbles over separate versus joint electorates and reservation of seats in legislative bodies and public services, offered Mohamed Ali an opportunity to indict the Congress for its failure to settle the 'Muslim claims'.

Mohamed Ali's powerful indictment of the Congress leadership was viewed with scepticism by some of his comrades. So was his plea for retaining the Khilafat Committees, which had ceased to have a mass appeal and backing and were confined to a section of people who were struggling to retain the name of the organization rather than to achieve its purpose.

In marked contrast to his erstwhile political guru, Mohamed



Ali, Ansari viewed Congress' role in a favourable light, severed his links with the much maligned Khilafat Committees, stayed clear of the communal processes at work, joined hands with the nationalist forces in the fight for *Swaraj* and combined with Congress, as in the making of the 'Indian National Pact', in breaking the communal impasse. In reaching such crucial decisions with a conviction rare among his contemporaries in the mid-1920s, Ansari was influenced by Congress' historic role in the nationalist struggle and the commitment of its leaders to communal amity and Hindu-Muslim integration. Guided by the belief that it was, in spite of its heterogeneous character, a non-communal body, he saw the fortunes of his community, as indeed of other communities, inextricably linked with the Congress movement. According to Ansari, the Khilafat Committees and their newly found allies in the Muslim League played the Khilafat game needlessly, orchestrated sectional interests with divisive overtones and adopted a political strategy which suited the interests of the government and its collaborators in the landed, business and service classes. He found himself increasingly at variance with their purpose and methods and was unable to reconcile his nationalist concerns with the sectarian bias of the Khilafat bodies. Ansari, much to his credit, stuck to his guns and was finally driven to take the painful but irrevocable decision of resigning from the Central Khilafat Committee of which he had been a member for many years. "On my return from England in June", he wrote to Shaukat Ali on 16 July 1926:

I found that communal passions had run amuck... I, therefore, felt impelled to... fight the demon of communalism which was devastating the country and



was breaking asunder strong ties formed between the Hindus and Muslims after centuries of intimate associations and common sufferings and sacrifice. As an Indian owing allegiance first to the motherland, I feel, I must sever my connections with all communal or sectional political organisations.<sup>16</sup>

Ansari and the Ali Brothers were old comrades, but circumstances, had now driven them into opposing camps and into conflict which left unhealed wounds.

Ansari's reactions to events in Turkey, formed after his visit to that country in the summer of 1925, were also refreshingly different from many of his Khilafat colleagues. Uninfluenced by accounts of Turkey's 'decay' and 'decline' he sent regular reports of the country's material progress accomplished by the Kamalist Republic. He was impressed by what he saw and admired the many achievements of the Turks in a period of turbulence and change. It was indeed a novel and worthwhile experience, for Turkey in 1925 was very different from what Ansari saw on his last visit in 1912. The country was then in the throes of a crisis, internally divided and externally besieged by enemy powers. But it was now engaged in the stupendous task of national reconstruction and on its way to achieving rapid socio-economic progress. Ansari was impressed. He was also impressed by the people he met. Then he added a sweetener for the Angora people. They were not quite as difficult or dreadful; in fact they were quite the reverse. Ansari found them willing to discuss every aspect of a question, anxious to clear misunderstanding, keen on placing their point of view, appreciating to the full the opposite viewpoint and amenable to reasonable suggestions.<sup>17</sup> He rebutted the charge of widespread irreligiousness and impiety

and observed:

I have not seen a more baseless and hollow charge... There are a number of free-thinkers, agnostics or atheists, as there are in all Eastern countries... But is this phenomenon new, or peculiar to Turkey? I have talked to people of different strata of a society; I have visited mosques and public places of worship at all odd hours and I am convinced that in spite of the high priests of free-thinking modernism and laocity (sic), the Turk is today as good a Muslim as he was ever before and more true to his faith than the Indian, the Syrian, the Palestinian or the Egyptian.<sup>18</sup>

Ansari's studied and balanced response is also reflected in his introduction to Halide Edib's *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*. He offered an appraisal of the pan-Islamic sentiment in India, explained why his community placed on the Turks 'the burden not only of defending their heart and home, but the honour of Islam and Muslim peoples as well' and lamented that the Turks did not appreciate their 'quaint romanticism' and 'chivalry' or endure their 'oppressive affection'. If the Turks had known what pan-Islamism meant to the Indian Muslims and why the 'pan-Islamist sentiment' was their 'most sacred and exalted passions' (sic), they would have understood their frustration over the collapse of the Khilafat. Ansari observed philosophically, "time has, no doubt, healed their wounds and they do not now reflect on the matter in the light of sentiment alone. But their world is still bleak and desolate and the wrecks of their dreams lie around them. The pan-Islamism that was once an idea is now a vague grievance; what was once a hope and an inspiration is now a sorrow. God



is still in heaven, but the world has apparently lost its balance. For the hero of the Islamic community has now become the Prodigal Son.’’<sup>19</sup>

Having dwelt on the pan-Islamic debacle, Ansari conceded that the abolition of the Khilafat was a matter of ‘sound policy’ because it involved the Turks in pretensions which gave them a certain prestige but which also exposed them to the jealous wrath of their enemies and the shiftiness of selfish friends. The Indian Muslims did not appreciate this because their perspective on the Kamalist Republic was ‘faulty’. They tended to identify belief, manners and customs with the prescriptions of faith. Religion and social life were, no doubt, inseparable and a society that altogether overlooked the religious element was sure to drift from one vicious whirlpool to another. They were also, according to Ansari, unable to distinguish between conservatism and stagnation; so they were ignorant of the good done by Mustafa Kamal. In a tone uncharacteristic of a professional surgeon and with a clarity and frankness rare among many of his Khilafat colleagues, Ansari not only justified Turkish reforms but also made out a case for a liberal interpretation of religious decrees in India. He wrote:

Religion is the permanent basis of life, but the true religious spirit does not seek to shackle life in order to preserve a theoretical consistency between fact and belief. It endeavours rather to discover fresh sources of inspiration, which are really nothing more than fresh points of contact between the personality of the founder of a religion and of the follower across the gulf of time and altered social conditions. *Rigid conformity to the latter... may be as injurious to*



*society as frivolous disregard for truth. There can thus be need for reform even when the law is all written down [emphasis added].*

The essence of Ansari's belief was that religion and politics no longer formed an indissoluble unity: they were separate realms concerned with different issues and functions, decided and performed by different experts.

### III

#### **Journey to Constantinople**

Ansari sailed from the Bombay harbour on 10 April 1925 in the company of his ailing friend, Ajmal Khan, who was to receive medical treatment in Paris and London. This voyage was different from his previous two. He first went to England as a student; later, he travelled to Constantinople as a relatively unknown doctor. But it was not the same on this occasion, for his reputation both as a professional surgeon and a statesman with much political acumen was firmly established in the countries he planned to visit. Ansari could have well anticipated the welcome that awaited him.

Ansari's first halt was Port Said where he and Ajmal Khan were enchanted by the reception extended by some distinguished Egyptians. He wrote: "The crowding of the main deck by long-robed officials, the warmth of their welcome, the flow of eloquent and sonorous Arabic in high-pitched voices, accompanied by even more eloquent gestures, though it warmed our hearts greatly, caused a little flutter in official dovecotes."<sup>20</sup> The reference was to the Viceroy of India, Reading (1860-1935), who was on his way to London.

Paris was the next stop. Judging from their letters home,

both Ansari and Ajmal Khan were quite ecstatic to be in the French capital and to see much that was new, such as the mosque and the Muslim Institute, situated on the same side of the river Seine as the University of Sorbonne and the Quartier Latin. They were also introduced to the *savants* of the Sorbonne and the University of Paris, received as officials of the Jamia Millia Islamia at a gathering of the *Rapprochement Universitaire*: and feted and lionized by the Carnegie Foundation, a melange of poets, artists, writers and rich young hangers-on. They lectured at the Societe de Sociologie de Paris and the Ligue du Droit de l'Homme et du Citoyen, on the non-cooperation movement, conducted discussions with several prominent Indians which convinced them that India's salvation lay in Gandhi's non-violent non-cooperation programme<sup>21</sup> and were able to keep up with the rapid, esoteric chatter that swirled around them. They were even quicker at becoming adept at the nightly partying. Ansari, in particular, looked every inch the polished performer.

After a month long stay in Paris, the doctor and the hakim spent six weeks in Lausanne where "at last we have got that complete rest and peace which has done us a world of good." The trip was all sweetness and light. Vienna was their next halt. There they saw the Medical Exhibition and purchased pathology specimens, charts and maps for the Ayurvedic and *Yunani Tibbia* College at Delhi. They also went for sightseeing though Ansari was depressed that the 'magnificent capital of the old dual monarchy looked like a ghost of its former self'. The chateaux, palaces, monuments, public buildings, squares and boulevards in Vienna 'stand today quite neglected, reminding one of their past splendour. The Austrians can hardly keep them in repairs'.<sup>22</sup>

Ansari's stay in Europe was rewarding. He made a round of



the hospitals and clinics where work on the regenerative methods of treatment was done, watched with care the technique of different workers and discussed their results with them. He visited Paris, Lucerne and Vienna specially and saw the work of Eugene Steinach, Robert Lichtenstern, a urologist, and S. Voronoff. He gained much in practical and clinical knowledge which was reflected in his paper presented at the Delhi Medical Association in October 1925.

Ansari parted company with Ajmal Khan in Vienna. While the hakim left for Marseilles, Ansari boarded the Orient Express on its journey to Constantinople. He reached the historic city on the morning of 19 July 1925. But it was a city with a difference. On 13 October 1923 the National Assembly had voted that Ankara (old Ancyra), founded by the Phrygian king Midas in the seventh century BC and once a great centre from which caravan roads led off into Persia, Syria and Armenia, be the seat of government. The decision to move the capital from Constantinople (Istanbul) into central Anatolia was in recognition of the fact that Anatolia now was in Turkey, unencumbered by European, Arab or African provinces. The shift to Ankara also symbolized a clean break with the Ottoman past. Ansari noticed the change. He reported in the columns of *Comrade* that Constantinople did not show the same 'bustle and activity' as in the days of the Ottoman Empire. He found large buildings, military barracks, depots and arsenals empty and bare. Caught up in post-war lethargy and weariness, the people were hungry, taxes were heavy and food scarce. Ansari wrote of 'a vast number of poor, ill-clad, starving humanity begging in the streets'.<sup>23</sup> He also referred to the uphill task of making a 'civilized' nation out of nothing, though he was acutely aware of the futility and superficiality of certain reforms, such as the 'Hat Law', being part of the



much-advertised modernism. Meeting old friends and comrades convinced him that, despite external threats and internal feuds, Turkey was surging ahead on the road to progress.

In relation to India generally and the Muslims in particular, Ansari commended the views of Turkish officials to the judicious and careful consideration of his people. According to his assessment, the Turks were sympathetic to the national ideals and aspirations of the Indians and believed that the greatest service India could render to world peace was to attain freedom speedily. Their message to the pan-Islamists in India was equally significant. In the first place, it was made plain that Turkey was beset with great external and internal difficulties and could not, therefore, participate in 'any movement involving fresh responsibilities'. Secondly, the Muslim peoples should work towards their educational, social and economic advancement, 'should not even think of electing a Khalifa' and *on no account lend themselves to perpetuate autocracy of an individual or a dynasty in any guise or shape* [emphasis added].

And finally, Ansari informed the readers of the *Comrade* that the Turkish officials 'are cognisant of the differences in their point of view and ours regarding the question of Khilafat'. But they maintained that it was better to have no Khalifa rather than to have one who would be 'ineffective' and even 'injurious'.<sup>24</sup> The Turkish Government could not have disavowed its remaining links with the pan-Islamists in India in a more forthright and categorical manner. Ansari's impressions, published in the *Comrade* of 18 September, sealed the fate of those intransigent pan-Islamists who hoped to make political capital out of the situation prevalent in Turkey. In fact, when Ansari returned to India at the end of 1925 he found the Khilafatists deep in the hot cauldron of

party quarrels because their movement had lost its *raison d'être*. The Khilafat party was split into factions and the factions into fractions.

## NOTES

- 1 F. No. 9, 1923, AICC Papers.
- 2 F. No. 25, 1924, AICC Papers.
- 3 F. No. 10, 1924, AICC Papers; Home Poll. K.W. II to 66, 1924, NAI.
- 4 *Tribune*, 27 January 1924, Home Poll. K.W. II to 66, 1924, NAI.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 8 January 1924; *IQR*, July-December 1923, p. 193 for *Jamiyat-al-ulum*; and p. 188 for Khilafat Conference.
- 6 F. No. 25, 1924, AICC Papers.
- 7 Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 139-40.
- 8 F. No. 13, 1925, AICC Papers.
- 9 Nehru to Syed Mahmud, 3 February 1925, in V.N. Datta and B.E. Cleghorn (eds.) *A Nationalist Muslim and Indian Politics* (Delhi, 1974), p. 32.
- 10 Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 137.
- 11 Home Poll, 197-I, 1923, NAI; Mohammad Sadiq, *The Turkish Revolution and the Indian Freedom Movement* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 10-19.
- 12 Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal* (London, 1928), p. 12.
- 13 Khaliquzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- 14 Mohammad Barkatullah, *The Khilafat* (London, 1924), p. 1.
- 15 For a brief outline of the role of the *ulama*, see Mushirul Hasan, 'Religion and Politics: The Ulama and the Khilafat Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 May 1981.
- 16 Ansari to Shaukat Ali, 16 July 1926, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 19.
- 17 *Comrade*, 18 September 1925.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Introduction, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, pp. v-vi. all subsequent references are from the introduction.
- 20 *Comrade*, 10 July 1925; Ghaffar, *Hayat-i-Ajmal*, p. 336.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 30 June, 24 July 1925.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 18 September 1925.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*



## Leading the Congress

ON his return to India in July 1926 Ansari noticed the changes on the Indian political horizon. The Congress, much to his dismay, was riven with dissension and its prestige had sunk to a low ebb. The Swaraj Party was in disarray because the 'Responsivists', supported by Malaviya and Lajpat Rai, were in open revolt. Having defeated Motilal Nehru's Swarajist alliance in the local elections held in 1925, the Malaviya group organized the Independent Congress Party. In the build up to the Provincial and Central Assembly elections, Hindu communal concerns provided most of the ammunition for the assault on the Swaraj Party. Motilal was accused of being a beef-eater, the Congress was stigmatized as a prostitute of Muslim India and such was the communal hatred aroused that Motilal afterwards considered retiring from public life.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, who had himself withdrawn from the hurly-burly of active politics and had at the beginning of 1926 imposed upon himself a year of silence on political matters, advised the dispirited Motilal to let the evil forces of communalism play themselves out and in the meantime to 'wait, watch and pray'.<sup>2</sup>

The storm of inter-communal antagonism was blowing with fury in the summer of 1926 and no voices could make themselves heard against the clamour of the rival partisans. Though explanations for the rise in the communal temperature ranged from the government's divide and rule policy to the

militancy of the Khilafat Committees and the Hindu Mahasabha,<sup>3</sup> there were few systematic attempts to curb violent eruptions. The festival of Ramlila occasioned widespread tension even in areas where Congress exercised much influence; its celebration at Aligarh in September was marked by one of the worst riots of the year. Delhi was transformed into something like an armed camp during the *Id* celebrations; yet a minor incident—the scare created by a bolting horse—left three persons killed and sixty injured. Violence was also rampant in Calcutta from June to October 1926. Inter-communal relations in several other parts of the country were generally strained. There was hardly any development of importance in politics, observed Coatsman, other than the slow and steady resurgence of Hindu-Muslim fracas and its establishment on new, wider and deeper foundations.<sup>4</sup> “The vision of *Swaraj*”, stated Srinivasa Iyengar (1874-1941), the Congress President in 1926, “has somewhat dimmed in the dust of internal strife.”

Ansari's response to such developments was predictable: it exemplified his national idealism, his antipathy to the mixing of religion with politics and the democratic and secular thrust of his concerns. He pinned his hopes, as always, in the Congress which enjoyed a special national status as the spokesman for India's diverse peoples. Other organizations, in his judgement, had neither the will nor the ideological coherence to rally popular support. The Muslim League and the Khilafat Committee, for instance, were enmeshed in narrow and sectarian politics and had, therefore, become peripheral to the nationalist mainstream. For this reason, he resigned from these bodies on 16 July 1926, stating explicitly that he owed allegiance to the Congress alone. Jawaharlal approved of his decision. Writing to Syed Mahmud from Geneva, he observed,



“I can see no way out of our difficulties except by prodding on—more or less secular lines in politics.”<sup>5</sup> Addressing a conference in Lucknow a few months later Ansari exhorted Muslims not to have any truck with communalism and join others in liberating the country from the clutches of foreign rule.<sup>6</sup>

On 20 March 1927 Ansari attended a conference at Delhi where a group of Muslim politicians, led by Jinnah, agreed to forego separate electorates if their four demands were met by the Congress *in toto*.<sup>7</sup> The first of these was that the Bengali and Punjabi Muslims should be represented in the Legislative Council in proportion to their population; the second was that one-third of the seats in the Central Legislature be reserved for the Muslims. Also that Sind be separated from the Bombay Presidency and constituted as an independent province and finally, reforms be extended to the North-West Frontier Province. “We have after all succeeded,” Mohammad Yaqub wrote triumphantly, “in finding out a formula on which there was a unanimity of Muslim opinion and which has shifted the burden of proof on the other party; it is for them [Hindus] to clasp the hand of friendship which the Muslims have extended.”<sup>8</sup>

When these proposals were placed before the AICC, Ansari, Motilal and Srinivasa Iyengar pressed for their acceptance as a basis for a political accord with the League. Their view prevailed. The only concessions offered to dissenters like Malaviya, Lajpat Rai and Moonje was that reforms for the North-West Frontier Province became conditional on the provisions of a suitable judiciary and the separation of Sind conditional on the separation of Andhra. Neither of these conditions militated against the spirit of the four proposals and both Ansari and Mohamed Ali were happy to swallow them.

Such a conciliatory response paved the way for a short term rapprochement between the Congress and the League. But the spate of communal riots continued unabated. Between the beginning of April and the end of September 1927, twenty-five riots were reported: ten in UP, six in Bombay Presidency, two each in the Punjab, the CP, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and one in Delhi (Table 7.1). During the seventeen months that the Viceroy, Irwin (1881-1959), had been in India, the whole landscape was overshadowed by the lowering clouds of communal tension, which repeatedly discharged their thunderbolts, spreading their devastating havoc throughout the country.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 7.1**  
**Communal Riots in India-April 1926 to August 1927**

<i>Province</i>	<i>No. of communal riots</i>	<i>Dead</i>	<i>Injured</i>
Punjab	3	61	380
UP	8	3	131
Delhi	3	4	116
Bengal	12	181	1,512
Bihar	7	14	114
CP	1	nil	7
Bombay	9	4	253
Madras	1	1	7

*Source:* Home Poll. F. No. 10/16, 1931 & K.W., NAI.

Irwin proposed a conference of Indian leaders to address themselves to the problem of growing Hindu-Muslim strife. But those who responded to the Viceroy's offer, including Ansari, discovered that such summits offered no magic or quick solutions. The discussions were essentially a dialogue of the deaf, with Muslim delegates—Mohamed Ali, Zafar Ali Khan,



Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Yaqub—insisting on tackling the political disputes first, while Malaviya, Lajpat Rai, Moonje and Raja Narendranath (1864-1945) were only prepared to discuss issues of social and religious discord.<sup>11</sup> The recalcitrance on both sides led to stalemate. The conference floundered without making any progress towards its avowed goal. In the end violent and scurrilous charges were bandied about, with the spokesman of each community blaming the other for its break up.

Undeterred by this ill-fated conference, the AICC inspired partly by the necessity of maintaining some semblance of solidarity in the Congress and partly by the genuine alarm at the growing Hindu-Muslim clashes, decided to discuss afresh the all-absorbing theme of communal relations. The outcome was a unity conference on 27 October 1927. Ansari was a key figure at the conference. He set the tone early on with an eloquent appeal for unity, spent hours in delicate negotiations and pleaded with Hindus and Muslims to create an atmosphere of non-violence. But such implorings did not carry matters very much further and the fundamentally irreconcilable aims of certain groups present ended in open rupture. The problem at hand was left precisely where it had been before the conference met. Though consensus was reached on conversion, cow-slaughter and music near mosques—issues on which Ansari made a detailed statement—its effect was blunted because the Mahasabha and League delegates had boycotted the conference.

The failure of the unity conferences was a foregone conclusion: there was never much chance of reconciling the claims of certain groups in the Congress, the League and the Mahasabha who had a vested interest in perpetuating communalism. They were afraid of giving away anything and felt it incumbent on them to stick to their demands. They were like

parties in a law-suit who thought the more extravagant their claims the more likely were they to secure a judgement in their favour. More importantly, an understanding on the immediate causes of conflict, such as the one attempted at Simla and Calcutta, could potentially undercut their support base and render them politically ineffectual. They made good in politics by acting as defenders and custodians of what they perceived as their community's interests in a region by exploiting religious sentiments or by keeping communal tensions alive. During the 1926 riots in Bengal, for instance, important Hindu and Muslim leaders remained provocatively silent, their attitude being interpreted as tacit approval of mob outrages and murders. Their favourite rhetorical device was to accuse the British of being the instigators of Hindu-Muslim discord.

Ansari was frustrated by repeated failures to counter the communal blitzkrieg; there seemed to be some malign fate attending unity conferences, for every one that was held since September 1924 had no other result than to drive the two communities still farther apart. But Ansari's own doggedness in negotiating a viable settlement did not go unnoticed; it was a commitment that never wavered. Contemporaries acclaimed this fact. They were further impressed by his loyalty to the Congress movement, especially when many of his comrades were, in the words of Motilal, 'tumbling over each other to shake hands with officials' and were afflicted by fear, prejudice and lust for power and wealth. It was easy for him to amass a fortune by concentrating on what was, in the early 1920s, a flourishing practice. But he chose to spend much of his time in politics and whatever he earned—his earnings were substantial because among his clients were some wealthy rajas and nawabs of northern and central India—was placed at the disposal of the Delhi Congress Committee. His house in



Daryaganj was virtually a Congress headquarters where meetings of the AICC and the Congress Working Committee were held. His clinic in Fatehpuri was frequented mostly by Congress workers who were treated free of charge. To his clinic in Daryaganj came the sick and the needy who lined up every morning to receive the attention of one of India's most reputed physician-surgeons.

With his record of service, the choice of Ansari as President of the 1927 Congress was no surprise. Gandhi wanted Ansari to wear the Congress crown. His reasons were quite simple: the doctor would be able to pilot a Hindu-Muslim pact through the Congress, his choice would command general acceptance, and his selection by a 'national association containing a preponderating majority of Hindus' was likely to foster Hindu-Muslim friendship.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi lauded Ansari's efforts to promote 'union' and pointed out how if he, Sarojini Naidu and Iyengar had not been pitchforked into the presidency of the Congress at the last three sessions, Ansari would have been elected on any of those occasions. His claim was postponed for 'special reasons', though his name was on everybody's lips when elections took place.<sup>13</sup>

With Gandhi's backing Ansari was in the running for the presidency: his election was a foregone conclusion. Yet he took the unusual, indeed unpopular, step of setting forth his views on Indian politics so that those who disagreed with him would have the opportunity of opposing his candidature. His views and the controversy they generated require explanation.<sup>14</sup>

In his statement of 17 August 1927 Ansari admitted that non-cooperation was dead, even though he believed "as firmly today as I did in 1920-21 in non-cooperation", and that the policy of blind obstruction within the Councils had failed.

He assailed *Swarajist* policies in the Legislatures and advocated direct action as was done in the non-cooperation days. While appealing to those who agreed with his assessment to keep away from the Central and Provincial Legislatures, he urged others who still desired to go to the Councils to confess that they were cooperators, to sink their differences and compose their quarrels, and form a people's party constituting the opposition.

“The country”, proceeded Ansari, “was a vast camp of warring communal factions bent on destroying each other”, and appealing to the authorities to protect them from the murderous onslaught of one another.” It was, therefore, necessary for the Congress to accord the highest priority to the communal malaise in its future programme. His own mission was to weld the various communities into a ‘single solid nation’. He wanted others to do the same. He enumerated three lines of activity which would minimize friction: extensive propaganda by leaders of both the communities for communal amity, and establishment of safety bureaus and conciliatory boards in every city and town. With the help of a Hindu and a Muslim journalist the safety bureau would scrutinize and, if necessary, contradict writings and news items calculated to incite communal passions. At the same time, Congress leaders would tour riot-prone areas and settle, if possible, issues of discord on the spot.

Ansari's panacea was a tried one. Public safety boards were started as a sequel to the decision arrived at the Unity Conference held in Delhi on 26 September 1924, but they were ineffectual. Also it was not for want of propaganda that the communal chasm persisted, for Congress resolutions and speeches of Indian nationalists extolled the virtues of Hindu-Muslim unity and comradeship with unfailing regularity.



Further, the immediate causes of friction were more often symptoms of a deep rooted socio-economic malady. The slaughter of a cow, the beating of a drum, the reception of a convert into one fold or the other, or the publication of something like *Rangila Rasul* acted as sparks which fired the powder and produced an explosion. The weakness in Ansari's analysis and the limitations of his remedial measures lay in his inability to grapple with the socio-economic roots of communalism.

The Congress Reception Committee, as was the practice, elected Ansari as its forty-second President on 4 September. Fourteen out of the seventeen PCC's voted for him; the only other nominee was Kelkar who had been nominated by three PCC's including his home constituency. Wrote the *Hindustan Times* of 7 September:

The nation is to be congratulated on the singular sobriety of judgement displayed at a crucial period of its history. A fitter recipient than Dr Ansari for the highest honour in its power could not have been found at the present juncture. His election at the crucial period of our history when the country is groaning under communal antagonism appears...to constitute a valuable national asset.<sup>15</sup>

Similar comments, coming from opposite party standpoints, show what a reputation he had at the time and how broadly it was based.

Elevated to the Presidency, Ansari followed the time-honoured tradition of inviting prominent Indian leaders, Hindu and Muslim, cooperator and non-cooperator, to attend the Congress at Madras. Referring to the disastrous results of

divided counsel and disunion, he made the plea for reuniting nationalist forces. Divisions in the body politic were merely over details: on matters of principle there was virtual unanimity. The reception accorded to Birkenhead's (1872-1930) 'lily white list', the all-British Statutory Commission, was a case in point. It provided an occasion to reunite those who were slowly drifting apart. 'If we can take advantage of the opportunity thus presented to us to organize public opinion and focus it on the speedy attainment of our goal, we shall have created a force in our political life which shall be irresistible'.

Ansari received a number of encouraging replies, some from unexpected quarters. Annie Besant, T.B. Saprú (1875-1949), and B.C. Pal (1858-1932) found the atmosphere favourable for team-work and suggested the getting together of various parties to draw up a constitution on the lines of the 1916 Congress-Muslim League scheme. Hasan Imam (1871-1933) and the Raja of Mahmudabad were for boycotting the Simon Commission; Mohammad Yaqub agreed that a large number of Muslims should attend the Congress; Abdur Rahim (1867-1952), though unprepared to meet other leaders on the Congress platform, wished to make plans for concerted action; Ibrahim Rahimtoola (1862-1942) affirmed that political progress could only be advanced by pulling together.

Among those who introduced a discordant note was the Home Rule Leaguer, Joseph Baptista (1864-1931), who argued that the boycott of the Statutory Commission would give a pretext to the British Government to 'restore autocracy on the ruins of dyarchy'. G.S. Khaparde (1854-1938), once a close lieutenant of Tilak, doubted the effectiveness of the boycott plan. The two Arya Samaj leaders—Bhai Parmanand, (1874-1947) and Lala Hansraj (1860-1938)—on the other



hand expressed disdain for manifestos containing either platitudes on unity or schemes of compromises which found little favour with most groups. Hindu-Muslim differences, observed Parmanand, were based on fundamental principles and the two communities were so far wide apart that cooperation on a common platform was neither desirable nor possible.<sup>16</sup> In a similar strain Haji Hidayet Hosain (1881-1935) of Kanpur indulged in outspoken criticism. He expressed his misgivings, shared by some of his contemporaries, in response to Ansari's circular to attend the Congress.

If the composition of Ansari's entourage for the Madras Congress was any indication, his initiatives certainly bore fruit. It included politicians of the old Delhi-Aligarh axis: Khaliquzzaman, Shuaib Qureshi, Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, Aziz Ansari, the Ali Brothers, Faridul Haq Ansari and Zakir Husain. For the time being party rancour was buried, differences eschewed and political rivalries set aside. All Madras, in fact, seemed awash in enthusiasm for Ansari, who won nearly unanimous applause for being in the national spotlight. Ansari's appeal seemed to work and party unity—on the surface, at least—was achieved against heavy odds.

Flanked on either side by Congress stalwarts and amidst cries of *Bande Mataram*, *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai ho* and *Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai*, the forty-second President of the Congress strode to the podium to deliver his address: that may have been Ansari's best political moment ever.

In his hour and a half long Presidential pronouncement, Ansari, as was to be expected of him, stressed unity—unity among communities, among political parties, among Congress-men and among legislators. Minor political irritants need not stand in the way of purposeful cooperation to thwart the sinister designs of the common adversary. And crucially,

given his image as an apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity, Ansari insisted that Hindus and Muslims sink their differences and abide by the agreement reached at the Calcutta Unity Conference.

Ansari devoted a substantial part of his speech to the Statutory Commission. The high-handed manner in which government disregarded the wishes of the Indian people must serve as an eye-opener even to the most confirmed optimist. This was thus met head on, at least rhetorically, and the thematics of the campaign against the Commission were set forth with precision and daring. "No sane or self-respecting Indian", he continued, "can ever admit the claim of Great Britain to be the sole judge of the measure and time of India's political advance. We alone know our needs and requirements best and ours must be the decisive voice in the determination of our future. It is our inherent and inalienable right." He, therefore, announced: "We can have no part or lot in a Commission which has been appointed in direct defiance of the declared will of the people of India"—a line that brought an approving roar from those present at the Congress session.

Quite understandably, Ansari's major concern was the 'ubiquitous microbe' which had infected every sphere of national activity. A nation trying to shake off foreign domination could not afford to carry on an internecine struggle, that freedom and communalism were incompatible and both self-respect and self-interest required looking beyond momentary and sectional advantage to the lasting national gain. He detailed the history of Congress efforts to resolve the political and religious differences, urged Congressmen to explain and popularize them and called upon Hindus and Muslims to exorcise the demon of communal and political discord.



The speech was logical, moralistic, intense and humourless. It was clear and forceful and as good-natured as the man himself: Ansari was not expected to suggest a radical or even a substantial change in the Congress programme; he was only expected, in view of the need for both political and communal unity, to make a forceful plea to all sections and communities to join the Congress and make it a strong national organization and articulate his vision of the national future. The *Tribune* complimented him on his speech, adding: "It was exactly the kind of lead to the Congress and the country that one had a right to expect from a man called upon to take up the national leadership at this supreme crisis."<sup>17</sup> He did not play to the gallery, avoided the use of catchwords calculated to confuse and mislead and refrained from suggesting heroic and spectacular methods for attaining *Swaraj*.<sup>18</sup> The policies he suggested were endorsed by most Indian nationalists and his message, commented the *Indian Daily Telegraph*, was not 'one of retrogression or stagnation, of depression or despair, but one of unflinching determination and unswerving faith in India's great destiny'.<sup>19</sup> The speech as a whole was admired and praised across party lines.

The Madras Congress adopted three vital decisions which had formed the main burden of Ansari's Presidential address. In the first place, consensus was reached on the communal question; the 'Unity Resolution' adopted was on the lines suggested by Ansari. The second resolution called for an effective boycott of the Statutory Commission 'at every stage and in every form'; the lead in this respect was also given by Ansari first in his letter of 1 December 1927 and later in his Presidential speech. And finally, the Congress committed itself to complete national independence at the insistence of Jawaharlal. On 27 December, he moved the resolution that

‘this Congress declares the goal of the Indian people to be, complete National Independence’. Gandhi thought that the resolution was ‘hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed’. Right-wing Congressmen agreed. Privately, the Mahatma rebuked Jawaharlal for encouraging ‘mischief mongers and hooligans’ and for not thinking out the whole situation and the resolutions which might be appropriate.

The significance of the Madras Congress was best summed up by the *Leader*:

The Madras Congress session has been the most remarkable and ‘successful one since the waning of the non-cooperation movement. The Presidential address was also unique of its kind, breathed a spirit of unity and harmony, and was characteristically outspoken. The complete independence resolution betokens the high moral courage of the Congress and is a necessary corollary of the dictum that *Swaraj* is the birth-right of the people. The boycott resolution has placed a practical programme before the country and the unity resolution marks the culminating point of the success of the last session of the Congress.<sup>20</sup>

## II

### **The Nehru Report and its Aftermath**

From the early days of their entry into the Legislative Councils, the *Swarajists* had pressed for revising the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Motilal, leader of the Swaraj Party in the Legislative Assembly, called for dismantling the halfway houses of dyarchy and the setting up of full provincial autonomy. When the report of the Muddiman Committee was



considered by the Assembly in September 1925, he proposed fundamental changes in the constitutional machinery. His motion was adopted. In November of that year the government announced the appointment of a Statutory Commission, and from April 1926 to November 1927 the Viceroy and the Secretary of State worked out the form, the terms of reference, and the composition of the Commission. On 8 November the British Government appointed a Statutory or Parliamentary Commission, known from its Chairman's name as the Simon Commission, two years before the time laid down by the Act of 1919.

The exclusion of Indians from the Commission caused quite a consternation. When its members reached Bombay's port, its years of projected labour were already doomed, torpedoed before it got underway, by the pig-headedness of a narrow-minded coterie of Imperial managers who put their selfish interests above the needs, aspirations and just demands of most humankind. The Muslim League, led by Jinnah and the *Jamiyat-al-ulama* declared emphatically that the Commission and the procedure, as announced, were unacceptable. Jinnah declared on 30 December 1927; "Jallianwala Bagh was a physical butchery, the Simon Commission is a butchery of our souls."<sup>21</sup>

When the Congress met at Madras at the end of the year, it noted to boycott the Commission, proclaimed independence as its goal and resolved to draft a constitution of its own. Earlier, representatives of all parties, including the Liberal Federation, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, held their first meeting on 12 February 1928 to respond to the British challenge that Indians could not produce a constitution of their own. Motilal and Jawaharlal were there, as were Jinnah, Lajpat Rai, Malaviya, Jayakar and most of the other leaders of political

India.

From February to July 1928 Ansari was engrossed in the deliberations of the All-Parties Conference, advising its members on matters small and large and providing a welcome leavening influence within the buttoned-up Motilal entourage. As President, at a time of deepening crisis against the government and its allies in India, Ansari was more stretched, with more work and more responsibility, than ever before. It was the kind of situation in which he thrived and which brought out the best in him. He spent long hours in negotiations and manoeuvres that were as obscure and confused at the time as they remain in retrospect. On 18 May he chaired a crucial meeting which took the momentous decision of appointing a committee, headed by Motilal, to draft a nationalist constitution.

Ansari's troubles did not end here. When the Nehru Committee Report was published on 15 August, he emerged as its foremost campaigner. In so doing, he made many enemies as a group of Muslims, mainly from UP, hammered away at the recommendations of the Nehru Report: the abolition of separate electorates, abandonment of reservation of seats for Muslim majorities in Bengal and the Punjab and of weightage in those provinces where Muslims were in a minority. And during the All-Parties Conference and the All-Parties National Convention, he found himself in a series of prickly exchanges, one involving Shaukat Ali who reproached Ansari for treating the 'Muslim viewpoint' with contempt and betraying the community's interest.

Though he occasionally displayed flashes of toughness, Ansari appeared determined to maintain a statesmanlike reserve. He tried hard to set the fears at rest, pursuing his task against a running barrage of ridicule, but without success. In



the end he concluded pityingly that Muslim opposition was based on ignorance and confusion of rights of minorities with the principle of representation. "I have been writing and sending telegrams to Muslim friends all over India," he informed Motilal, "to start an organized campaign in support of the constitution and against the senseless and unreasoned opposition started by Shaukat Ali and his party along with his henchmen, the Muslim reactionaries."<sup>22</sup> The report, according to him, provided more 'real' and 'solid' safeguards to the Muslims than the League of Nations to racial minorities of the newly-constituted states of Europe. The value of constitutional safeguards, in any case, was questionable, for they were 'bounties of inefficiency'. "The more a minority has of them," he said, "the more it will need and protected from the bracing spirit of free competition by charitable provisions of the constitution, it will sink deeper and deeper into ignorance, fanaticism and sloth to be stifled ultimately by the very cords which had appeared to offer it a partial support."

"The Nehru Report", stated Ansari, "heralded the dawn of a brighter day". At the Calcutta Convention he warned the delegates of an alien government and its attempts to widen the religious divide and the communalists who were 'inspired by the gospel of more bread and butter'. At the same time, there was no reason to fear the communalists whose 'days are numbered'. "Already a new generation is coming to the front", announced Ansari, "to which differences between Hindus and Mussalmans are unknown and which will not and cannot think in communal terms." How unprophetic was this view is borne out by the future history of the Indian sub-continent! Ansari's well-meaning statement failed to recognize the intensity of communal feelings and was devoid of any appreciation of how, over the years, the political demands of

certain Muslim groups had stiffened and that it was no longer possible to either ignore them or to dismiss them lightly. There was no escape from a recognition of this painful reality. To deny, as Ansari did, the deep communal divide in the country and to brush opposition aside or smother it with ridicule or vituperation served no purpose. If anything, it led to the belief in some Muslim circles that the Congress was unwilling to come to terms with the political demands embodied in the Delhi proposals and in various Muslim League resolutions passed from time to time. This was the burden of Jinnah's speech at the Calcutta Convention where he staked several issues. But his arguments carried no conviction with his audience which, according to one of his recent biographers, marked an even sharper veering off from the road of the Congress than Nagpur had been in December 1920. Nagpur had ended Act One. Calcutta finished Act Two. 'This time there would be a larger intermission.'<sup>23</sup>

Ansari's defence of the Nehru Report was disapproved. Shaukat Ali, delighted at Ansari's discomfiture, burst forth in his best denunciatory vein, chiding Ansari for playing the 'generous liberal minded patriot at the expense of one's people' and for supporting a report which 'intentionally treated the Muslim point of view with undeserved contempt.'<sup>24</sup> "I know the present Hindu mentality well", he told Ansari, adding that "they do not want our friendship, they want our allegiance and God-willing, they will never get that."<sup>25</sup>

Mohamed Ali, fresh from his trip to Europe, echoed the same feelings, pillorying Ansari in his public speeches; indeed the Nehru Report ushered in a new phase of personal bitterness between the two men. The report, he said, would establish 'a legalized tyranny of numbers', jeopardize Muslim interests everywhere, and lead to the ascendancy of the Hindu



Mahasabha. Ansari had actually warned Motilal in mid-September that “it would be a hard fight as it is, but if Jinnah and Mohamed Ali both go against us the tussle will be harder still.” Mohamed Ali’s outburst confirmed his worst fears. At the same time it did not come as a surprise. Over the years, he had developed a point of view from which everything said or done by any Hindu or Congress Muslim was attributed to the Mahasabha influence.

Ansari was disgusted by the rough and overbearing attitude of the Ali Brothers. He found Shaukat Ali, in particular, opinionated and conceited, a dictator who shouted down his opponents and treated those who disagreed with him as if they were trying to start a breakaway body. Having idolized him for the last eighteen years, “worshipped the very ground on which you trod, [and] had given you such friendship, love and loyalty”, he was no longer willing to follow him. “When I saw the clay feet of my idol”, he wrote some months after the incident, “I felt as if the world had turned topsy-turvy, and that I could never, in future, trust anyone whoever it might be.” He painfully added that friendship with the robust Maulana would never be the same. “At an age,” he wrote, “new friendship and new attachments are difficult, if not impossible to make. Therefore, life in future would be the less fuller, the less richer for want of such friends as you and I have been. I, however, bow to the inexorable march of events and have fortified myself against whatever the future may have in store, and have prepared myself to go on working in the service of my faith and my country, in the best manner that I can do.”<sup>26</sup>

Ansari and the Ali Brothers were old comrades who had worked together in several political movements from the time of the medical mission to Constantinople. But they drifted

apart on the issue of the Nehru Report. The Ali Brothers' extremely fragile relationship with the Congress was also disrupted for the same reason and they gravitated towards the politically conservative All-Parties Muslim Conference. Writing to Mazharul Haq about them in the most scathingly critical terms, Ansari referred to their association with the 'Aga Khan & Co' whose only 'distinction is that they have always been reactionary both to Indian and Muslim affairs'. He added that their differences which initially concerned a few provisions of the Nehru Report 'have now grown into a conflict of the very outlook.'<sup>27</sup>

Ansari was unfairly accused of political apostasy and opportunism. He could hardly be expected to allow his political views to be permanently governed by the friendships of his youth. At some stage—probably after the Khilafat movement had petered out—he weighed the wisdom of following Mohamed Ali and found it wanting; references to him in Ansari's private letters were at best equivocal and sometimes derogatory. He realized that he could not take the views of anyone, however distinguished, on trust; he had to work out his own views for himself.

Not only were the political methods of Ansari and the Ali Brothers different—sometimes embarrassingly different—but also their perception of the Congress and its role in Indian society. Ansari was among those who refused to become the drift-wood of the communal tide and who during the worst period of communal animus did not allow his broad national outlook to be perverted. He adhered to the Congress movement which, according to his firm belief, served the larger interests of the country and derived legitimacy from its impressive record of launching countrywide crusades against the Raj. The Ali Brothers held the same view until the mid-



1920s. “The Congress”, wrote Mohamed Ali in 1925, “is and must remain the only national political organization...Let the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha both perish, let the Congress and the nation survive.”<sup>28</sup> In 1928-1930, however, this opinion was drastically altered. The Congress, the hero of Khilafat days came to believe, was no longer a national organization but a Hindu one, unprepared to condemn those Hindus who were perpetuating communal discord and unprepared to work towards the creation of an India in which all communities could live in harmony. The Nehru constitution was the ‘legalised tyranny of numbers’, for it threatened to subject the minority province Muslims to a communal Hindu majority. Those Muslims who supported such a constitution, chief among whom was Ansari, were Congress stooges.

The vehemence of Mohamed Ali’s attack, while certain to alienate many of his political friends as Ansari, was not certain to attract new support; in fact its immediate effect seems to have been even to increase his unpopularity. And it could not have helped his uneasy frame of mind to know—as he must have done—that his reputation, both personal and political, had not been improved by his outburst against Gandhi and the Congress. Cooperation requires give-and-take, but there was no ‘give’ in Mohamed Ali’s politics. He became a political isolationist and preferred ploughing a lone furrow. Many of his erstwhile comrades who had been the butt of his ridicule, his satirical verses and cutting epigrams were glad to find an opportunity or an excuse to turn against him and to think and speak ill of him.

It has been necessary to dwell at some length on Mohamed Ali’s role because, in the years to come, Ansari had to counteract his influence through the All-India Nationalist Muslim Party. Mohamed Ali represented a stream in Indian

Muslim politics which threatened to destroy Ansari's vision of a secular polity, free from communal prejudice and animosity. Though Mohamed Ali died in 1931, he left behind a legacy which was potentially divisive. Ansari's task was to stem this process and to weld the two communities into a coherent whole.

### NOTES

1. Page, *Prelude to Partition*, pp. 134-5; Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 121-4; C.A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics—Allahabad 1880-1920* (Oxford, 1975).
2. B.N. Pandey, *Nehru* (Delhi, 1976), p. 119.
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10. Speech on 29 August 1927, *India in 1927-28*, p. 17.
11. See press clippings in Ansari Papers, JMI.
12. *Young India*, 21 July 1927, CWMG, Vol. 34, p. 214.
13. *Ibid.*
14. For Ansari's statement, see *Times of India*, 19 August 1927.
15. *Hindustan Times*, 7 September 1927; *Basumati*, 13 September, Ansari Papers, JMI.
16. *Hindustan Times*, 15 December 1927.
17. *Tribune*, 26 December 1927. For comments on Ansari's Presidential address, see Ansari Papers, JMI.



18. *Leader*, Note on the Press, UP, for the week ending 7 January 1928, *ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*; *Bombay Chronicle*, 27 December 1928.
20. Note on the Press, UP, for the week ending 14 January 1928.
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23. Wolpert, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-2.
24. To Ansari, 6 September 1929, F. No. 105, AICC Papers.
25. To Ansari, 19 May 1929, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 70.
26. 14 June 1929, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, pp. 65-6.
27. To Mazharul Haq, 7 September 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 80-7.
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## Leading the Congress Muslims

I N the aftermath of the Nehru Report controversy, the Congress had to reckon with the crystallization of Muslim political demands, embodied in Jinnah's 'Fourteen Points' and articulated by the All-Parties Muslim Conference. It also had to allay Muslim fears arising out of the Nehru Report which were echoed at the Khilafat and Muslim League meetings held in the Christmas week of 1928. Gandhi tried to soothe suspicions with assurances that *Swaraj* did not mean Hindu Raj and held discussions with Jinnah in February and August 1929 to explore possible avenues to peace. But, as on previous occasions, his endeavours were thwarted by Lajpat Rai, Malaviya, Jayakar, Moonje, working President of the Hindu Mahasabha (1927-35), and Kelkar who urged the Mahatma not to reach a solution outside the terms of the Nehru Report.<sup>1</sup> Lajpat Rai refused to accept any modification,<sup>2</sup> while Jayakar pressured Gandhi not to yield to the Muslim demands on the ground that the government, as in 1919, would deliberately make concessions in the future constitution.<sup>3</sup> Caught up in the cross fire between the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, Gandhi wrote to Motilal in anguish: "How that can be done [resolving the communal deadlock] or whether it should be done, you know best. My mind is in a whirl in this matter. The atmosphere is too foggy for me to see clearly."<sup>4</sup>

Since the Gandhi-Jinnah talks were not leading to tangible results and the crusade against the Nehru Report was gaining



momentum, the Lahore Congress prudently decided to let the Nehru Report lapse. To woo the Sikhs and Muslims it was resolved not to accept any solution of the communal problem without the concurrence of the minorities concerned.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi hoped that the two momentous decisions arrived at Lahore—declaration of complete independence and the launching of civil disobedience—would enable leaders of various shades of opinion to draw their followers into the anti-colonial struggle. He wrote in *Navajivan*: “If we have true freedom we will shed communal fear. Hindus and Muslims will cease to fear one another.”<sup>6</sup>

To soothe Muslim feelings was not enough. The issue was, how to arrest their growing alienation from the Congress. The process had begun soon after the Khilafat movement came to a halt and was attributed to a wide range of factors, including the supposed hegemony of the Hindu Mahasabha, Congress’ inability to curb assertive and militant expressions of Hindu revivalism, and its reluctance to recognize Muslim political aspirations.<sup>7</sup>

The charges levelled against the Congress were often flimsy, exaggerated and misleading. But because of its low credibility in certain areas it was possible for Muslim publicists and propagandists, aided and abetted by the government, to convince their followers that the Congress would jettison their interests in any future scheme of *Swaraj* and that their ‘salvation’ lay in either forging an alliance with the government or in pursuing independent political action. An index of the success of Abdur Rahim in Bengal and Mohammad Shafi in the Punjab was the steady communalization of politics as well as the gradual decline in Muslim participation at annual Congress sessions and their representation in national, provincial and district Congress committees.

Table 8.1 indicates the attendance of Muslim delegates at Congress sessions from 1918 to 1923. Though complete figures for later years are not available, the number of Muslims gradually dwindled from a few hundred to less than a score. Likewise, Muslim representation in the AICC was impressive, showing an increase from 11.1 per cent in 1919 to 24.5 per cent in 1923 (Table 8.2). In 1922-23, 84 of the 338 AICC members were Muslims. By 1928, their number was reduced to 54 out of 332.<sup>8</sup> Provincial and district Congress committees also had very few Muslim members. In UP only seven Muslims served on various district committees: one each in Gonda, Allahabad, Jhansi, Moradabad, Fyzabad, Azamgarh, and two in Barabanki.<sup>9</sup>

The desertion of Muslims from the Swaraj Party was linked with their alienation from the Congress. In 1922-23 Motilal built his support among an influential group of Lucknow and Allahabad based professional men in UP: Sherwani, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Khaliquzzaman and M.H. Kidwai. In Bengal C.R. Das forged an alliance with several leading Khilafatists and lured them into supporting the Swaraj Party by offering a set of extravagant concessions. In consequence, his party swept the November 1923 polls, capturing an overall majority of seats, including half the Muslim seats.

**Table 8.1**  
**Attendance of Muslim Delegates at the Sessions of the**  
**Indian National Congress, 1918-23**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total no. of delegates</i>	<i>No. of Muslim delegates</i>
1918	3,975	205
1919	6,717	314
1920	13,532	1,050



1921	4,201	521
1922	NA	NA
1923	1,550	111

Source: Compiled from Reports of the Annual Sessions of the Indian National Congress.

Table 8.2  
Composition of the AICC, 1919-1923

	1919 (161 members)	1920 (163 members)	1921	1922 (338 members)	1923
Hindus	139	133	124	242	248
Muslims	18	21	33	84	83
Sikhs	-	2	2	9	8
Parsees	3	4	2	-	-
Christians	1	2	2	3	2

Source: Gopal Krishna, ‘‘The Indian National Congress, 1918-1923’’ (D. Phil thesis, Oxford, 1960), p. 747.

This impressive support was steadily eroded after the Bengal Congress repudiated the Das Pact. There were 15 Muslim *Swarajists* in 1923: there were none in 1926. The picture was the same in UP. As against 11 Muslims nominated and 4 elected in 1923, 6 were renominated in 1926 and only 1 returned. The same mood was reflected elsewhere. Of the eight *Swarajist* Muslims returned in 1923 to the Central Assembly, only 3 were elected in 1926.

In the midst of such mutual acrimony, the silver lining from the Congress point of view was that political activity among Muslims was sporadic and fragmented and the polarization of communities along religious lines had yet to occur. Conflicting regional, local and class interests—a consequence of the

uneven development of the Muslims in different parts of the country—deepened the fissures within a supposedly ‘Muslim party’ and exposed the hollowness of the League’s claim to represent all Muslims. The formal split in that body between the Jinnah and the Shafi factions in 1927 was symptomatic of the deep-rooted divisions in the so-called monolithic Muslim polity. Any new party, whether cobbled together by the Khilafatists or the Leaguers, promised to be a splintered structure that could collapse at any moment. Such was the fate of the Muslim conference after 1932. The organizers, like the Dutch Army, were all generals but no soldiers. Most belonged to the landowning class and none of them was prepared to spearhead the movement or to follow the other.<sup>10</sup>

Equally noteworthy was the fact that, while Muslims were moving away from the Congress, they were not necessarily swelling the ranks of the League which was still a highly disorganized, inefficient and unrepresentative body. Jinnah’s brave attempts to infuse some life into it were poorly rewarded; the Leagues’ total membership rose from a mere 1,093 in 1922 to a mere 1,330 in 1927. Provincial Leagues did not fare any better; the branch in the Bombay Presidency had 71 members in 1928. The 1929 session was adjourned for lack of a quorum. The adjourned meeting, held four months later in Delhi, ended in a fiasco. When Iqbal presented his historic address in 1930 demanding the establishment of a Muslim state in north-western India, the meeting at Allahabad did not even have its quorum of 75 members.

Thus the challenge to the Congress did not quite emanate from the League, but from local and regional expressions of what is variously described as ‘Muslim communalism’, ‘Muslim separatism’ and ‘Muslim nationalism’. At the same time, it was a comforting thought that within the Congress ranks were



a number of important Muslim groups, 'most distinguished and trusted leaders and counsellors'.

Most 'Nationalist Muslims' were associated with the nationalist movement from the days of the Rowlatt *satyagraha*, though the expression became current in the mid-1920s to draw a distinction between Ansari and his comrades, on the one hand, and the Ali Brothers, Mohammad Shafi, Shafee Daoodi and others connected with the Muslim Conference, on the other—all portrayed in the nationalist Press as detractors of the Congress and allies of the government. "They are men", said Ansari, "to whom the freedom of the country from alien rule comes merely as a bad second to communal privileges."

How, then, does one describe Muslim groups connected with the Congress movement at various levels? It is convenient for descriptive purposes to identify them as Congress Muslims. Admittedly, this term does not quite encompass the range of their activities in the social and educational spheres, but it unmistakably indicates the pro-Congress thrust of their political concerns both in relation to the community and the country at large.

There were two main sources of inspiration for the Congress Muslims. Some like Azad and Husain Ahmad Madni (1879-1957), head of the *Dar-al-ulum* at Deoband, derived their nationalist ardour from their interpretation of Islam as a religion of freedom and equality, of justice, of cooperation with, and respect for, all mankind. In May 1930, leading members of the *Jamiyat-al-ulama* came around to accepting Gandhi's leadership in the civil disobedience movement; their conference at Amroha called upon Muslims to join Congress and appointed a committee to prepare a programme of action for attaining freedom; the rival conference—*Anjuman-i-Tausi-i-Islam*—set up by government and encouraged by the Nawab

of Chhatari (1889-1892) and the Ali Brothers was a fiasco. By mid-June the *Jamiyat* was able to enrol 15,000 volunteers and over 100 of its leading members were in jail; in Delhi its volunteers went around securing pledges from Muslims that they would discard the use of foreign cloth. Kifayatullah, President of the *Jamiyat*, and Ahmad Said, its Secretary and Director of the 'War Council'; were arrested on 11 October 1930 and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. In the mid-1930s Madni defended full and individual Muslim participation in the freedom struggle by advancing a theory of territorial nationhood for India rather than by appealing to concepts of safeguards and community confederation. His ideas were expressed in a public controversy with Iqbal shortly before the latter's death in 1938.

The principal Muslim groups, besides the *Jamiyat-ul-ulamā*, which acted in unison with the Congress in the late 1920s, spanned several provinces of British India. In the Frontier Province, the Khudai Khidmatgars (Servants of God), led by the charismatic figure of Ghaffar Khan, were at the head of a nationalist and socially progressive movement. Their presence on the all-India political scene was first noticed at the Lahore Congress in 1929 and within two years of its creation the Khudai Khidmatgar Party claimed a membership of 200,000.<sup>11</sup> Quotations from the *Quran* against slavery served as rallying points for nationalist enthusiasm and the struggle to liberate the country from foreign rule became the Holy War of the Khudai Khidmatgars. "No section of India," observed W.C. Smith in 1943, "has been more thoroughly nationalist."<sup>12</sup>

During civil disobedience in 1930-31 Khudai Khidmatgar activities were linked with the general Congress movement—the connection being strengthened in August 1931 when the



Afghan *Jirga* merged with the PCC. The local *Jirgas* became local Congress committees, while 'Red Shirt' volunteers became part of the Congress at various levels. The whole movement was to be conducted in accordance with the Congress constitution and the flag to be used was to be the Congress flag. The architect of this alliance, Ghaffar Khan, explained in November 1931:

People complain against me for having joined the Congress by selling my nation. The Congress is a national and not a Hindu body. It is a *jirga* composed of Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, Parsis and Muslims. The Congress as a body is working against the British. The British nation is the enemy of the Congress and of the Pathans. I have, therefore, joined it and made common cause with the Congress to get rid of the British.<sup>13</sup>

The intensity of civil disobedience in the Frontier Province, so obviously overlooked by some historians, was reflected in the number of those prosecuted and convicted. Until September 1932, the figure was 5,557 in a total population of twenty-five lakhs. In neighbouring Punjab, on the other hand, the number was 1,620, though the population was more than eight times that of the NWFP.<sup>14</sup> Convictions in NWFP were also higher than the Bombay Presidency (See Table 8.3).

Table 8.3

	<i>Convictions in Jan.-Feb. 1932</i>	<i>Convictions in Mar.-Sept. 1932</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bombay	5,165	6,311	11,476
NWFP	4,318	1,239	5,557

Source: Home Poll. F. No. S/72, 1932, NAI.

Towards the end of 1932, out of 1,500 civil disobedience prisoners in the Peshawar jail, 5 were Hindus, 2 Sikhs, the rest being Muslims. In the Haripur Central Jail there were 1,938 Muslims and 24 Hindus. In the province as a whole over 90 per cent of the civil disobedience prisoners were Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly Ghaffar Khan's message struck a favourable chord in an area which had remained relatively tranquil during non-cooperation and was not fully exposed to either the institutional or agitational politics of most other parts of British India. Ghaffar Khan's motto, "We are Pakhtuns but until we attain freedom we do not deserve to be called Pakhtuns"<sup>16</sup> remained the rallying slogan of the politics of the Frontier Province in the decades before the partition of India.

The Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam, organized in 1929 by a group of Punjabi Muslims who had seceded from the Khilafat committees, was based on the well-to-do peasantry and the lower-middle classes. Its followers combined economic grievances and religious passions to formulate their militant policies. They expressed something of the old Khilafat movement tradition: an ardent and explicit enthusiasm for Indian freedom. Like the Khudai Khidmatgars, they steadily, fervently and inspiredly plunged into the civil disobedience movement and went to jail in large numbers. In Delhi, they combined with the *Jamiyat-al-ulama* in organizing processions and picketing liquor shops, leading to the arrest of Azad, Kifayatullah and twenty-five Ahrars in early March 1932. Reminiscent of scenes during the Rowlatt *satyagraha* was a mammoth meeting at Fatehpuri mosque where 4,500-5,000 Muslims pledged their cooperation with Gandhi's civil disobedience movement.

The spur in political activity, combined with several factors, strengthened nationalist and progressive forces among the



Kashmiri masses, more than three-quarters of whom were Muslims. The Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, founded in 1932, was a symbol of their aspirations. "The Conference", stated its founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah (1905-1982), "though Muslim in name was national in spirit and was concerned with the welfare of all communities." He declared in 1931 and, again in 1935, that the country's progress depended on harmonious communal relations and his fight was for the emancipation of the country. "Let us all rise above petty communal bickerings and work jointly for the welfare of the masses," he said. In the years to come, the economic programme of the Muslim Conference, embodied in the 'New Kashmir' Plan, and its political orientation was akin to that of the Congress. Abdullah repudiated the two-nation theory and hitched the fortunes of his people with Indian nationalism.

In Bombay, Syed Abdullah Brelvi (1891-1949), editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, launched the Congress Muslim Party on 8 July 1929 in an attempt to induce Muslims to join the Congress. His chief support lay among urban-based politicians, such as Yusuf Mehrally (1903-1950), editor of the English weekly *Vanguard*, Abbas Tyabji (1854-1936), a lawyer with long-standing associations with the Congress movement, and M.C. Chagla (1900-1982), also a lawyer who came to the forefront as a vociferous champion of the Nehru Report. Gandhi blessed the Congress Muslim Party with the message: "If it is fully supported and does not go to sleep, it may prove a tower of strength to the Congress and an instrument of real service to India generally and to Mussalmans in particular."

The Congress Muslim Party, in spite of stiff opposition from Shaukat Ali and his followers among the Urdu-speaking

Muslims, established its hold in Bombay city. Brelvi, backed by several Muslim mercantile associations in Bombay, led a mile-long procession on 2 June 1930 and presided over a meeting of about 10,000, including a large number of Hindus, which called on Muslims to cooperate in the civil disobedience movement. "Conspicuous amongst organizers of procession and speakers at meeting," noted a government report, "where certain Maulanas and Muslim propagandists from other provinces. To this extent, [the] procession must be regarded as success of Congress propaganda and it must be admitted that during the last fortnight many Muhammadans have been gathered into the Congress fold".

Such examples provide a corrective to the impression, created by government officials and perpetuated by historians of Indian nationalism, of the Muslim community being arrayed against civil disobedience. This is not to deny that, compared to 1920-21, their enthusiasm was much less. But to compare their response in these years to the civil disobedience days, and, then to draw evidence of their indifference or hostility is quite misleading. The religious passions evoked by the Khilafat question were both unique and unprecedented: there was no such issue in the early 1930s to evince the same degree of interest.

## II

### **The All-india Nationalist Muslim Party**

Among the Congress Muslim groups in the late 1920s, the All-India Nationalist Muslim Party (NMP) acquired greater significance because it mirrored local and regional manifestations of nationalist aspirations among Muslims. Such trends remained either dormant in a party of Congress' size or were



not adequately projected for fear of inviting the wrath of Muslim communal elements. But they found adequate expression in the making of the NMP and soon became part of, and eventually merged into, the broad stream represented by the newly-formed party and its ideology.

The NMP occupied a vital position both in terms of its influence in urban areas as well as in articulating the views of Congress Muslims. For the first time, they could address themselves exclusively to issues concerning their community either in relation to or independently of the party to which they owed allegiance and express themselves freely and frankly. The NMP offered a platform which ideally suited their political objectives.

Formed on 27-28 July 1929, after the AICC, at Allahabad discussed the question of forming a new party to organize Muslim support for the Congress in general, and the Nehru Report in particular, the resolution adopted for forming the NMP stated:

The political struggle started in 1919 is being gradually weakened by inter-communal conflicts and repeated attempts are being made in different quarters to wean Muslims away from political activities. The present disruption among political-minded Muslims and the consequent apathy of the mass of the Muslim community towards the problem of Indian freedom are due to a confused appreciation of the political obligations implicit in the fact of the community being a part of the Indian nation. Muslim political activity is now confined under the auspices of the existing Muslim institutions, to winning political responsibility as the main objective and with freedom for the country as merely incidental thereto. Hence the need for the new

party. The formal objects of it are to promote among Muslims a spirit of nationalism, to develop a mentality above communalism and to inspire into them greater confidence in Indian national ideas, to induce Muslims to take their proper share in the national struggle and to create such relations between the majority and minority communities as would lead the former to consider the rights of the latter in a spirit of broad-minded patriotism.<sup>17</sup>

At its first meeting held at Sherwani's house in Allahabad on 27 July 1929, a central body was constituted: 28 members were elected from Bengal, 27 from the Punjab, 3 from the Frontier, 24 from UP, 14 from Delhi, 17 from Bihar and 10 from Bombay and Sind. Seven provincial and seventy-one district branches were established. District branches in UP were set up in Lucknow, Rae Bareilly, Allahabad, Banaras, Faizabad, Hardoi, Bijnor, Saharanpur, Bareilly, Meerut, Aligarh and Shahjahanpur. In the Punjab, there were NMP committees in eight districts. There were ten of them in Bihar and at least four in Bengal—Calcutta, Dacca, Bogra and Faridpur. The Dacca Committee was headed by Shamsul Huda and Ghulam Qadri, the Calcutta Committee by Mujibur Rahman, Akram Khan, K. Nooruddin and Abdur Razzaq (both Calcutta Corporation councillors), while the local branches in Bogra and Faridpur were controlled by a scattering of others who had been active in the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements.

On the strength of this wide network built in a relatively short time, the NMP claimed to represent the 'entire Muslim intelligentsia' and consisted of people not wedded to the scheme of separatism. Ansari declared that its strength was derived from the intelligentsia, backed by the Muslim masses, and that no other single group of Muslims was as representa-



tive as the NMP. Elements that went in the making of the Muslim Conference 'defy definition and if you remove the members of All-India Muslim League, the Central Khilafat Committee, you would find that the real men who go by this name are an unknown quantity'. He scoffed at the League, pointing out that it had long ceased to be a reality, while the Khilafat committees, once so powerful in the country, 'were now but a shadow of its former self. He concluded with the assertion that the NMP was the 'real representative group of the Mussalmans of India today'.

These were highly exaggerated claims. Yet, there can be no doubt that the NMP, in spite of its limited political base, had the *potential* of being a powerful force among Indian Muslims. The first warning signal to the government and its Muslim collaborators came when Ansari and his comrades, with Congress backing, staked their claim to represent Muslims at the Round Table Conference in London. Gandhi insisted on taking Ansari with him to demonstrate Congress' representative position and told the Viceroy that without him he would be 'perfectly helpless' in Hindu-Muslim negotiations.<sup>18</sup> But the Viceroy did not acquiesce. The Mahatma said in an interview in London that whoever prevented Ansari from being selected as a delegate committed a 'fatal blunder'.<sup>19</sup>

The exclusion of Ansari did not end the worries of the organizers of the Muslim Conference who faced the cheerless prospect of losing some of their supporters to the NMP. After all, the NMP was gaining ground with the help of some influential Muslims who had built their reputation through years of selfless political work. Its meetings at Lucknow (18-19 April 1931), Faridpur (27-28 June 1931) and Lahore (24 October 1931) were well-attended, and its policies had a favourable impression on Muslims in the NWFP, Punjab, UP

and Bombay. "One of the most gratifying signs of the times," commented the *Leader*, "is the rapid growth of nationalism among Indian Muslims. The opponents of Indian progress and their allies, the muslim communalists, will not be willing to admit this fact. But the impressive gathering of the nationalist Muslims at Lucknow from all parts of the country tells its own tale."<sup>20</sup>

Encouraged by the NMP conferences, Ansari worked feverishly to weld together the various Muslim factions and tried to persuade them to accept his party's proposals on joint electorates and adult suffrage, on other issues there was no fundamental difference between Jinnah's 'fourteen points' and the main resolution passed at the NMP meeting on 18-19 April 1931. On the question of electorates the NMP reiterated the Nehru Report recommendation, considering separate electorates a negation of nationalism. Political problems, argued Ali Imam, President of the Lucknow Conference, were a reflex of social forces. "If you erect an iron wall between community and community in their politics, you destroy the social fabric... Nationalism can never evolve from division and dissension." Ansari, too, refused to countenance separate electorates. The measure and method of representation in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures should be settled, he said, on the basis of joint electorates and adult suffrage, and any constitution which did not contain these provisions would be wholly unacceptable to the Muslims. And he proposed a round table conference of Muslim organizations to iron out their differences.<sup>21</sup>

This statement seemed to conjure up a mood of reconciliation and set the stage for the real business at hand: ongoing talks between representatives of the NMP and the Muslim Conference. On 10-12 May they met at Bhopal. Discussion



centred round the vexed issue of joint *versus* separate electorates. Ansari, aided by Khaliquzzaman and Sherwani, insisted on joint electorates for the first ten years with the provision for a referendum thereafter. Alternatively, fifty per cent of the seats were to be contested on the basis of joint and the other half on the basis of separate electorates in the first general election. The arrangement was to change in the second election when two-thirds of the seats were to be contested by joint electorates. Thereafter, joint electorates with adult suffrage, as proposed in the Nehru Report, would be introduced.

Iqbal, Shafi, Shaukat Ali and Nawab Ismail Khan (1884-1958), taking their cue from Fazl-i-Husain, pressed for joint electorates and adult suffrage after ten years, though with the provision that they could be introduced earlier if a majority of legislators so desired. Their other proposal provided for five years of separate electorates with a referendum on joint electorates at the beginning of the fifth year.

The discussions at Bhopal, announced Ansari with characteristic over-optimism, raised the prospect of a settlement. But his hopes were soon belied by the intrasigence of delegates from both sides, combined with Fazl-i-Husain's stout refusal to endorse a compromise. When talks resumed in Simla on 21 June 1931, the Punjab leader reignited the controversy by insisting on separate electorates and wanting the Congress to state its position on weightage and reservation of seats for the Muslim majorities in Bengal and the Punjab. Ansari found the atmosphere at Simla 'very inauspicious' for any compromise.<sup>22</sup> The conference there managed to accomplish more than to restate a daunting agenda of continuing problems and differences.

Much of the blame for the failure of the Bhopal and Simla meetings was put on Ansari and his colleagues, and a w

orchestrated campaign was launched to deride the NMP. Shaukat Ali, had made no effort to disguise his hostility. "I consider you all to be weak men," he told Syed Mahmud, "and renegades, and, yielding to the open threats of the Hindus, [to] have chosen to live at their mercy."<sup>23</sup> This was an ill-chosen way to dramatize his contention that the Congress Muslims had 'sold out' to the Hindus. Ansari found Shaukat Ali's attitude both unintelligible and unreasonable, but tried to convince him that religion and faith were private matters, not symbols to be exploited by partisan politicians. But the Maulana persisted with his barrage of ridicule, causing much distress to Ansari who was a man with strong feelings and a deep instinct of loyalty. He attached importance to keeping his word and observing obligations. The unforgivable crime, in his eyes, was treachery: once he suspected anyone of not playing straight, he could be implacable, and once his confidence was lost, as in the case of Shaukat Ali, it was almost impossible to recover.

Ansari watched helplessly as his initiatives were rejected and his overtures fell on stony ground. Meanwhile, Ansari was dogged by persistent ill-health. With a dilated and diseased heart he had been carrying a tremendous load of work and responsibility and pushed himself very hard. He, therefore, toyed with plans for going to Bad Neuheim (Germany) for treatment and a prolonged period of rest in Europe. He planned to be away some time in January 1930, but was caught up by the turn of political events in the country, and in domestic chores. In May he was involved in arranging the wedding of his friend and political comrade, Shuaib Qureshi; in August he lost his brother Abdur Razzaq; and in the same month (28 August) he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Central Jail, Delhi, for organizing civil disobedience



in Delhi. He was transferred the following day to the Gujarat Special Jail where, according to Ghaffar Khan, “under the guidance of Dr Ansari we had formed a parliament of our own to train us to run our government which, we thought, was in the offing.”

Ansari was out of jail at the end of January 1931 but was constantly kept in a ‘whirlpool of excitement’. He finally sailed on board the S.S. Victoria at 11 A.M. on 11 August 1932 in the company of Sherwani.

Ansari was treated for his heart trouble at Bad Neuheim. He, then, spent an educative week in Vienna where he was welcomed in the select Viennese society of professors, literary, scientific and artistic people. His next halt was in Ouchy-Lausanne. Here he felt lonely as he did not have a friend or acquaintance. But he enjoyed the unaccustomed peace and quiet of his surroundings and kept himself busy writing letters to Aziz Ansari and Shaukatullah, reading books, sightseeing and making arrangements for sending his son, Ahmad Harold, born from his second marriage and now a medical practitioner, settled in England. From Lausanne he travelled to Paris in November and then to London where he stayed till 13 December. This was one of his many visits to Europe and all his joy in scenery and open air was reawakened.

Ansari returned to Delhi on 14 January and went up to see Jawaharlal at the Naini Central Prison in Dehradun. Jawaharlal noted in his prison diary on 17 February:

Ansari suddenly turned up without any previous warning... Freshly returned from Europe full of stories of common friends and memories of old haunts in Switzerland and elsewhere. He looked much better than when he came in July. But his heart still gives

trouble. He has wandered all over Europe while I sat and fed and slept in this same old little cell.<sup>24</sup>

Ansari reached India in a thoroughly gloomy frame of mind. The old communal spectre, far from withering away, was assuming a new and more malignant guise. But what distressed him most was the disintegration of the NMP, of which he was the chief architect. As he sensed the threat of its imminent break-up, he felt powerless, frustrated and increasingly unhappy. Khaliquzzaman, no longer inhibited by fear of Ansari's disapproval, signed the NMP's death warrant in UP by associating with the Muslim Conference in founding the Muslim Unity Board. In the Punjab the NMP was unable to make much headway because of Fazl-i-Husain and the Unionists and in Bengal it lost out to Fazlul Haq and the United Muslim Party. The new Muslim Majlis, formed in UP and Bengal to join hands with progressive and nationalist elements, made no dent on the growing alignment of communal forces. Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, another of Ansari's favourites and founder of the Bengal New Muslim Majlis, joined with Husayn Suhrawardy, while Mujibur Rahman found it difficult to cope with the confusing plethora of groups among Muslims. By 1934, the NMP was split into various factions and the Congress Muslims stood 'divested of every shred of principle or practice on the basis of which they formed their group and which they had proudly nailed to their masthead—of everything all, except their name!'<sup>25</sup> "By its very nature", observed Khaliquzzaman many years later, "the NMP could not make much progress. Under its name, several conferences were held, but it had no rules or regulations, no separate membership and no office. Being backed by the Hindu Sabha Press it lived in the newspapers all right but



beyond that it had no positive existence. My idea that it might serve to bring about discipline in Nationalist Muslim ranks did not materialize because the remedy was not potent enough to eradicate the evil.’’<sup>26</sup>

### III

Explanations for the NMP's decline already exist. Jawaharlal attributed it to the upper middle class background of its members, the absence of 'dynamic personalities' amongst them and their method of drawing-room meetings and mutual arrangements and pacts. "At this game" he argued, "the communal leaders were greater adepts and they drove the Nationalist Muslims from one position to another, made them give up, one by one, the principles for which they stood. Always the Nationalist Muslims tried to ward off further retreat and to consolidate their position by adopting the policy of the 'lesser evil', but always this led to another retreat and another choice of the 'lesser evil'. There came a time when they had nothing left to call their own, no fundamental principle on which they stood except one, and that had been the very sheet-anchor of their group: joint electorates. But again the policy of the lesser evil presented the fatal choice to them and they emerged from the ordeal minus that sheet-anchor.’’<sup>27</sup>

To Jawaharlal's perceptive explanation, one must add the strong opposition of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim Conference. The NMP also had to contend with powerful local and regional groups. Working under severe constraints, it could not, for instance, replace the Unionists in Punjab and the Praja Krushak Party in Bengal. Its resources were inadequate, the political experience of its leaders was limited and the

support extended by their community was at best lukewarm and half-hearted. The NMP was a platform for nationalist groups—the *Jamiyat-al-ulama*, the Khudai Khidmatgars, the All-India Momin Conference and the Ahrars—but it lacked the cohesion and the ideological thrust to serve as an alternative party to either the Muslim Conference or the League. It was, therefore, reduced to arbitrating between the Congress and communally-inclined parties—a role Ansari played in the early 1930s. At the same time, there were serious difficulties in playing this role effectively and sustaining it for long. That is why while such constituents of the NMP as the Khudai Khidmatgars, the *Jamiyat-al-ulama* and the Ahrars retained their individuality, Ansari and his compatriots went their separate ways. Consequently, the NMP lost its *raison d'être* as an independent political entity.

The Congress Muslims suffered from another drawback. With their image indissolubly linked with the Hindus, they were pictured as renegades and accused of a sell-out. The *Himmat*, the *Al-Khalil*, *Mansur* and the *Aligarh Mail*—newspapers published in UP—denounced the NMP and its leader, Ansari, for sacrificing the community's interests at the altar of the Nehru Report. The *Al-Khalil*, quite uncharitably, dubbed them as 'traitors' and 'mercenary agents' of Motilal and other Hindus.<sup>28</sup> It was not surprising that such charges were bandied about, for the NMP could only be discredited in this manner in the eyes of the Muslim masses. Its leaders, therefore, should have anticipated the nature of the assault and adjusted their strategy accordingly. But they did nothing of the sort. What was equally disconcerting was the absence of any desire to remove this false impression. Ansari persevered doggedly, for he had a greater awareness of the need to respond to the pressures for change than a great many



of his Muslim contemporaries. He also had the courage and the conviction to assert his political will and faced the daunting challenge posed by both the Hindu and Muslim communalists with tenacity. He had often to meet criticism and at times bitter attacks, but he never hesitated to carry the issue to the floor and fight it out with his critics. This was so during the communal bickerings over the Nehru Report. But his lieutenants in the NMP were weak, disorganized and unwilling to solve their problems of tactics, coordination or leadership; in fact Ansari soon became aware of how wayward were the elements he was seeking to fuse into one. Used to playing second fiddle—first to Mohamed Ali and later to Ansari—some NMP members gradually succumbed to communal pressures; others chose to be defensive, sulking when faced with the combined assault of the Muslim Conference, the Muslim League and a section of the *ulama*. This was true of Syed Mahmud, Khaliquzzaman, Shuaib Qureshi and Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, all bound to Ansari by personal rather than political loyalty. Jawaharlal's experience with such leaders led him to observe in April 1937:

Our experience of the Nationalist Muslim Party in the past was not a happy one. Such half-way grouping confuse the issue and the masses are perplexed... Those who agree (with the Congress) should not stand on the doorstep; they should enter the nation's chamber and take full share in shaping the nation's policy.<sup>29</sup>

The failure of Congress Muslims to face the ideologues of the Muslim Conference and the League can be attributed to their inability to formulate a coherent ideological programme

and to place their support for the Congress movement in a framework acceptable to the politically conscious sections of the Muslim community. A section of the *ulama*, especially those connected with the *Jamiyat-al-ulama*, were able to do so because they worked out a theory of Islamic nationalism *versus* imperialism—one which was grounded in the basic tenets of Islam. Their opposition to communal politics, as conducted by the League, was also based on a neat set of ideas which were rooted in Islamic beliefs and ideology. The future of Islam, as indeed of its followers in India, lay in combining with the forces of nationalism in opposition to the Raj. This was not all. The All-India Momin Conference and the Khudai Khidmatgars, though confined to certain regions, carved out their sphere of influence by reconciling their nationalism with the specific demands and distinct interests of their constituents. The Congress Muslims made no such endeavour.

The weakness of the Congress Muslims' position stemmed from their narrow and unstable political base. The NMP was composed of a small number of professional men—lawyers, doctors and journalists—who did not operate in politics from a position they could claim their own. They were mainly dependent on the goodwill of leading Congressmen who, in turn, patronized them so as to lend credence to their own claim of representing all Indians. There was nothing wrong in relying on Congress; in fact, it was consistent with NMP's political objectives. What proved detrimental to its progress and led to its eventual collapse, was the absence of any systematic endeavour to extend the political base outside the Congress circles. This was largely due to the rather limited concerns of the Congress Muslims. From the time of the Nehru Report they were caught up in constitutional issues and were involved, somewhat obsessively, in matters concerning



joint *versus* separate electorates and reservation of seats. Ansari was closely associated with the All-Parties Conference, Shuaib Qureshi served as a member of the Nehru Committee and Khaliquzzaman, Syed Mahmud, Sherwani and Khwaja were enmeshed in constitutional controversies which raged from the time of the first Round Table Conference and culminated in the squabbles over the Communal Award. So was Ansari. But such preoccupation led to no tangible results: given the alignment of forces, the capacity of such men to negotiate a compromise was, in any case, limited. In consequence, they operated on the fringes of Indian politics and were made, in the words of Shaukat Ali, a cat's paw by their Congress co-workers. Their fate was similar to that of the Liberals.

The limited interests and concerns of the Congress Muslims are further reflected in their indifference towards the socio-economic problems of the country and the community they claimed to represent, a fact which made them out of touch with the complex interplay of forces in Indian society. Admittedly, there was much identification with the Kisan movements in UP during the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements, while Ansari touched on the problems of the working class in his statement of August 1927. But beyond such expressions of sympathy and concern, the Congress Muslims did not address themselves to issues outside the realm of constitutional politics. They had no role in the working class movement in Bombay and made no contribution to the debate on agrarian issues in UP, Bihar and Bengal. Their speeches and manifestos, though useful and important in relation to the communal phenomena, were devoid of any socio-economic content because they only dimly understood the economic and social changes that were taking place around

them. This would probably explain why their perspective on and analysis of communalism was lacking in political depth, comprehension and wisdom. Viewing it largely in the context of the struggle for power, influence and authority, they demonstrated no awareness of the complex historical process and the contemporary socio-economic structures which engendered various forms of tensions and animosities, including Hindu-Muslim rivalries. It would also explain why their political base did not extend beyond the urban-based professional groups. Their disintegration as a cohesive, and independent political entity was imminent.

The position of Congress Muslims was also weakened by the apathy of their comrades in Congress. Admittedly, they formed a constituency, the Congress assiduously courted in the 1920s to deepen its support. They were flattered and cajoled by Gandhi during the Khilafat campaign. Ansari and Ajmal Khan, for instance, were adroitly used to follow a middle-of-the-road policy and to exercise restraint on the militant Khilafatists led by the Ali Brothers. Later, they formed valuable allies in dealing with estranged communal relations, projecting Congress policies among Muslims and securing their electoral support. Motilal made special efforts to woo Ansari, Shuaib Qureshi and Khaliquzzaman from the time of the All-Parties Conference in early 1928 till the National Convention in December of that year. Gandhi did the same, making laudatory references to their fervent commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and insisting on Ansari's participation in the Round Table Conference.

Such symbolic gestures did not help Congress Muslims in their struggle against the communalists. Faced with the combined opposition of the Mahasabha and the Muslim Conference Ansari and the NMP required strong ideological



and political backing. This was not forthcoming. They were merely used on occasions, given decorative positions in the Congress hierarchy and loudly proclaimed as selfless and devoted leaders. At the same time, they were wilfully ignored in crucial negotiations and their point of view was often disregarded with undeserved contempt. This was so at the Lahore Congress in 1929. It was a situation which left Ansari restless and frustrated, conscious of his abilities as an organizer and seeing the job that needed to be done, without the chance to take a hand in it. "We found the atmosphere in Lahore", wrote Khaliquzzaman, "very secretive and when in private talks the leading Congressmen decided to throw the Nehru Report into the Ravi, even Dr Ansari was not consulted... Dr Ansari, Tasadduq and myself were leaving Lahore in the evening for our destinations, humbled, disappointed and angry... At the station we had enough time to decide between ourselves that the Nehru Report having been drowned in the Ravi, we could not take the responsibility of shouldering the burden of fighting for the independence of India, for the Muslims were bound to consider it to be a purely Hindu fight."<sup>30</sup>

Assuming, somewhat prematurely, that the Congress Muslims had no large following, the Congress preferred to negotiate with their rivals and was willing to compromise on their terms. They at best were bargaining counters; when not so, they could easily be stored in the deep freeze.<sup>31</sup> This placed Ansari and his friends in a quandary and damaged their credibility in the eyes of their followers. Thus when Gandhi conveyed his readiness to compromise on separate electorates, Khwaja reacted angrily: "It means," he wrote indignantly, "that you are prepared to surrender the Congress Muslims who have fought the battles of the country side by side with

you to those Mussalmans who have done nothing except for themselves, their seats, their posts, their salaries and their lunches and dinners at the Government Houses... So far they [CongressMuslims] have fought against the Government and against the self-seekers of their own community... If now they are thrown overboard by the Congress or by you, they must either clear out of the field altogether or must henceforth fight against the Congress.' Khwaja opposed both separate electorates and communal representation as he felt that the 'salvation of the Muslims lies in the salvation of the motherland and the salvation of the motherland in its turn lies in the mutual trust and goodwill of the two great communities.'<sup>32</sup>

Ansari's correspondence with Gandhi and Motilal in the summer of 1930 illustrates his disenchantment with the Congress strategy of popular mobilization pursued during civil disobedience. Equally revealing is how the constraints imposed by the Congress limited his political options and that of his comrades, and consequently reduced their effectiveness in propagating the gospel of nationalism among Muslims. This was aptly summed up by Ansari in early January 1930—soon after his criticism of the Lahore Congress resolutions was ignored. Writing to Sherwani in a touchy and despondent frame of mind, he summed up the guidelines of his political conduct in the following terms:

We must not leave the Congress, nor must we do anything to weaken the Congress. After all the will of the majority must prevail, that is the only guide for any democratic institution... To leave the Congress would be to commit political suicide, to oppose the Congress would be a crime. Therefore, we must remain in the Congress and let those who believe in



the present policy and programme carry on.

Again

as... for joining the Liberals or the communalists it is unthinkable for you and me. The Liberals will never do anything, even though they are kicked out of the Round Table Conference... As regards the Muslim communalists, we have... extricated ourselves from them. We have formed the 'Nationalist Muslim Party' and it would be the height of unwisdom to leave that party or to cease working for its objects. *To my mind, that is the only avenue left for our political activities* [emphasis added]. We must put all our mind to it and carry on a vigorous campaign to wean the Muslims away from the influence of communalists and reactionary leaders and think and act in terms of 'nationalism'. *That is the only channel left for our political activities* [emphasis added].<sup>33</sup>

It is perhaps surprising to find such a sober, commonsense approach in a man who combined strict standards of political honesty and political obligation with a passionate emotional involvement in what he was doing. This is not to argue that Ansari was right—that is a question of opinion which every historian of Indian nationalism will answer for himself: only that in opposing Gandhi, Ansari and others who shared his views acted from conviction and in their own opinion would have been false to the principles which brought them into the Congress movement if they had acted otherwise.

## NOTES

- 1 Jayakar to Gandhi, 23 August 1929, Jayakar Papers (437), NAI. In his reply, Gandhi assured Jayakar that he had not 'found anybody' because he had no representative capacity. 'I simply listened to Mr Jinnah's exposition of his position. Similarly with the Ali Brothers too, I heard what they had to say. With the latter the talk turned upon their grievance against me for my reticence.' Gandhi to Jayakar, 24 August 1929, CWMG, Vol. XII, pp. 289-319.
- 2 Lajpat Rai to Motilal Nehru, n.d., F. No. 108 (Suppl.), AICC Papers; also, see Moonje to Malaviya, 31 July 1928, Moonje to Gandhi, 5 August 1929, Jayakar Papers (437).
- 3 Quoted in Uma Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism: The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition* (Delhi, 1977), p. 50; R.J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-1940* (Delhi, 1974), p. 101.
- 4 Kaura, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 5 Resolution on the communal problem passed by the CWC, July 1931, F. No. G-37/1931, AICC Papers; *IQR*, July-December 1929, pp. 310-11; Motilal to Secretary, reception committee, *Jamiyat-al-ulama*, 29 April 1930, Motilal Nehru Papers.
- 6 9 January 1930, CWMG, vol. XLVII, p. 381.
- 7 Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan*, Vol. 2, pp. 424.
- 8 F. No. G/59, 1928, AICC Papers.
- 9 F. No. 11, 1926, *ibid.*
- 10 Khaliquzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- 11 D.G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan* (Varanasi, 1969), p. 116.
- 12 Smith, *op.cit.*, pp. 266-67.
- 13 Home Poll. F. No. 5/54, 1932, NAI.
- 14 Home Poll. F. No. 5/72, 1932, NAI.
- 15 Home Poll. F. No. 3/7, 1934, NAI.
- 16 Home Poll. F. No. 5/54, 1932, NAI.
- 17 Khaliquzzaman, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-2.
- 18 Gandhi to Irwin (telegram), 20 July 1931, Gandhi to Viceroy, 29 August 1931, CWMG, Vol. XLVII, p. 156.
- 19 Interview to *Bombay Chronicle*, 14 September 1931, p. 12, Gandhi to Ansari, cable, 14 October 1931, CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, p. 148.
- 20 Note on the Press, UP, for the week ending 23 April 1931.
- 21 *Leader*, 19, 20, 22, 23 April 1931, Page, *op.cit.*, p. 238.
- 22 *Mussalman*, 25 June 1931; *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 June 1931.



- 23 26 April 1929, Datta and Cleghon (eds.) *A Nationalist Muslim*, p. 94.
- 24 *SWJ*, Vol. 5, p. 458; Ansari to Latif, 26 January 1933, Abdul Latif Bijnori, *Latif Ki Kahani* (Bijnor, 1967).
- 25 Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 139.
- 26 Khaliquzzaman, *op.cit.*, p. 102.
- 27 Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 139. Also K.M. Munshi, *Pilgrimage to Freedom*, Vol. I (Bombay, 1967), p. 29.
- 28 Note on the Press, UP, for the week ending 29 June, 6, 20, 27 July, 17 August 1929.
- 29 Statement to the Press, 25 April 1937, *SWJ*, Vol. 8, p. 128.
- 30 Khaliquzzaman, *op.cit.*, p. 104.
- 31 Chatterji, *Aspects of Bengal Politics*, p. 73.
- 32 Khwaja to Gandhi, 12 March, 1931, A.M. Khwaja Papers; *Bombay Chronicle*, 21 April 1931.
33. Ansari to Sherwani, 6 January 1930, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, pp. 90-91.

## The Final Act: Civil Disobedience and After

THE decision of the Congress to launch civil disobedience created a breach between Ansari and his mentors and led to his isolation, at least for the time being, from the humdrum of political life. In view of the serious nature of the rift, Ansari promptly relinquished the positions he held in Congress and became 'only an ordinary member'. This was a painful decision for one who had occupied so central a position in its hierarchy for nearly two decades. But given Ansari's sense of propriety it was not a surprising course of action. He had done the same in 1926 following his differences with the Central Khilafat Committee which, much to his distaste, had begun to spearhead communal causes.

In 1930 Ansari's estrangement with the Congress was over the efficacy of starting civil disobedience, an issue on which he had a greater degree of agreement with the Liberals than with his partymen. He was unable to attend the Congress Working Committee meeting on 14-16 February where plans for defying British authority were laid out, but had earlier warned Gandhi not to be carried away by the popular response to Independence Day, which was observed on 26 January. "It was easy to join processions", he had written, "but quite difficult to face hardships and withstand repression."<sup>1</sup> This was followed by an impassioned appeal from Jaora. Ansari's



reasoning was that the country was not prepared for civil disobedience because political conditions were quite the reverse of what they were in 1920, Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity was wanting and there was danger of the non-violent campaign being submerged by the breaking out of violence.<sup>2</sup> Civil disobedience would therefore be a reckless course and cause 'incalculable damage'. The Congress should thus retrace its steps and, among things, concentrate on the uphill task of restoring communal amity which was not only one of the basic items in the Congress programme, but according to Ansari's conviction, '*the one and only* basic thing'.<sup>3</sup> In a subsequent communication, he pleaded with the Mahatma to reconsider his decision and warned that his politics of confrontation would not appeal to most sections of the population. "Your movement," he wrote, "would thus fail to fructify and all the sacrifices made by you and those who would follow you would be wasted. This is how I have visualized the whole movement. Believe me, if I saw it as you do, I would have taken the marching orders and had been with you in the thick of the fight and not merely giving my blessing to the movement by mere words. You have that without asking for it."<sup>4</sup>

Ansari's position was easily misunderstood. He was suspected of having gone over to the side of the Ali Brothers and betrayed his leader Gandhi who valued and solicited his support. Ansari was quick to repudiate such allegations. He had no sympathy with Shaukat Ali's distorted view that civil disobedience was aimed against the Muslims, for his perspective on the contemporary political situation was not dictated by sectarian or communal considerations. His charge was 'a piece of monstrous falsehood and unworthy of any Mussalman'.<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi agreed with Ansari that the Hindu-Muslim tangle

was the 'problem of problems', but felt that it had to be approached differently. Political adjustment between the two communities, according to him, was possible only after the 'evil' British power was removed and not before; 'there will be no charter of independence before the Hindus and the Muslims have met, but there can be virtual independence before the charter is received'.<sup>6</sup> Motilal was sharp in his rebuttal: "You say the country is not ready for civil disobedience. If so, when and how are you going to make it ready? Do you believe that in the present temper of the so-called leaders of the two communities, it is possible to arrive at any formula? Even if it were possible which I seriously doubt how will the existence of that formula on paper carry us in our conflict with the foreign government?... I have definitely come to hold the opinion that *no amount of formulae based upon mutual concessions which those making them have no right to make, will bring us nearer Hindu-Muslim unity than we are at present* [emphasis added]."

He concluded by claiming credit for realizing, "what it means to me and mine to throw in my lot with Gandhiji in the coming struggle. Nothing but a deep conviction that the time for the greatest effort and the greatest sacrifice has come would have induced me to expose myself at my age and with my family obligations to the tremendous risks I am incurring. I hear the clarion call of the country and I obey."<sup>7</sup>

This manifesto marked a significant shift from the earlier position, one which was not easily discernible to most of Motilal's contemporaries. The resolution of communal conflicts was one of 'Congress' main concerns in the 1920s. It was no longer so. Realizing its vexed nature and constrained by the dictates of political expediency, the Mahatma-Motilal axis was now willing, though reluctantly, to let matters drift. Such was



the perception of some contemporary observers.<sup>8</sup> Ansari felt that the Congress had not done enough to achieve unity and regretted that Gandhi and Motilal were not so 'persuasive, so active, or so masterful as the great importance of this question required'. "Perhaps you were not very confident of yourselves", he told Gandhi, "or perhaps you felt you could not succeed in bringing, about a communal settlement by means of conferences. Whatever the causes that is how it struck me and many others."<sup>9</sup> Others, on the other hand, disapproved of some of Gandhi's pronouncements during this period, such as his speech in Delhi on 7 March and at the *Jamiyat-al-ulama* session on 1 April 1931.<sup>10</sup> The *Mussalman* took strong exception to his remark that Hindus should not 'return blow for blow but treat the Muslims as brethren, even if the Muslims are wrong' and contested the implicit notion of an 'aggressive' Muslim versus a 'defensive' Hindu community. Communalists were among both the communities. The only difference was that the Hindus, being in a majority, had the advantage of palming off their communalism as nationalism or altruism.<sup>11</sup>

The point was overstated. It was wrong to assume a communal bias on the part of Gandhi or Motilal and, then, to expect them to produce a magic formula which would resolve the issue altogether. What deserved reflection was their insistence that a successful anti-colonial struggle would cement bonds of unity and minimize Hindu-Muslim friction. Gandhi told Ansari that a meeting of minds could only be accomplished through fighting for common causes and wanted him to recognize the new orientation he had given to the civil disobedience campaign. This assumption, though questionable in the light of subsequent happenings, was based on Gandhi's experiences in dealing with the communal divide. Having

failed to heal the communal wound through his own methods, he reached the inescapable conclusion that independence would precede and not succeed the resolution of the communal question.<sup>13</sup> Ansari did not share this view. He felt that Gandhi's way of bringing about unity had already proved ineffective when conditions for joint action were ideal and reiterated his faith in mutual adjustments through dialogue and discussion, a method considered ineffectual by Motilal and the Mahatma. In a candid and perceptive elaboration of this argument—one which illustrates Ansari's differences with Gandhi as well as offers clues to his way of dealing with the communal tangle—Ansari observed:

Immediately after the setback of the N.C.O. movement, there was a reaction which, instead of keeping the Hindus and Muslims together, made them fight each other as they had never done before. Unity patched up to fight a common foe always breaks down as soon as the fight ceases. Unity during a deluge or in the face of any elemental force is brought about by common danger and lasts till the danger lasts. Unity to be lasting should be achieved during normal and peace time after careful thought and based on collective judgement. The parties should have occasion to fully weigh the gains and losses and should accept them with open eyes and full knowledge. *This is possible only through conferences, as in the present pressing circumstances led by a great urge* [emphasis added]. This is how other countries have achieved it. I believe that urge is felt today by the contending parties. Along with the Liberals, the imprimatur of the Congress would have aided much to help them onwards. *I have*



*all along pinned my faith in mutual adjustments through formal and informal conversations [emphasis added].*<sup>14</sup>

Gandhi's high-minded sentiments did not inspire most of the members of the NMP. Ansari's letter and Gandhi's reply created doubts in Syed Mahmud's mind and he sought advice, torn between loyalty to Jawaharlal and dislike of the Lahore resolution, reinforced by his need to earn a living at the bar.<sup>15</sup> Sherwani was disappointed because the Mahatma's reply showed utter indifference to the feelings of those Muslims who stood by him in his movement just like soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Khaliquzzaman wondered about the future of the Congress Muslims. If they were to accept Gandhi's order of priorities and time scale, they would, in effect, proclaim to their co-religionists to find their leaders in people who played the communal game unabashedly. Khaliquzzaman did not want this to happen. He wanted to form a group committed to the creed of independence and, at the same time, insistent on Hindu-Muslim unity as a cardinal basis for India's progress. The future protagonist of Pakistan discerned widespread support for this view and hoped that many Muslims who left the NMP on the issue of the Nehru Report would return to its fold in sheer disgust with the aggressive attitude of Jinnah and Shafi.<sup>17</sup>

It was all very well to feel aggrieved and nurse grandiose plans of future political strategy. But the Congress Muslims realized, more than anybody else, that they could not afford to defy their party and stay aloof from civil disobedience. They recognized, as Ansari did, that their political fortunes were inextricably linked with the Congress and they could only stay with it by following the dictates of the brute majority.

Exhorting Sherwani not to do anything drastic, Ansari stated the obvious: “to leave the Congress would be to commit political suicide.”<sup>18</sup> His heart was not in civil disobedience,<sup>19</sup> but he ultimately joined the Congress bandwagon partly because of his personal loyalty to Gandhi and partly because of his desire to remain in the political mainstream. Thus when Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950) appealed for his return to the Working Committee in July 1930 after the arrest of the two Nehrus, he was quick to respond. He issued a press statement which was prompted by the government’s stern counter measures, the ‘unparalleled fidelity of a people to the principles of non-violence’ and the shockingly retrograde recommendations of the Statutory Commission report. He rejoined the Working Committee in August as he could neither ‘view with equanimity the policy of ruthless suppression’ nor allow government to ‘kill the paramount national organization of India, loyalty to which had been my lifelong creed’.

He succeeded Azad as Congress ‘dictator’ and was arrested on 27 August 1930 while the Working Committee meeting was on at *Dar-us-Salam* in defiance of the official ban. He served another term in prison. Succeeding Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) as Congress President, he was arrested in Delhi on 8 January 1932 and was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment. The man who was a reluctant participant joined civil disobedience in the larger interest of the country and languished behind British jails.

Ansari’s NMP comrades followed their leader once Gandhi was arrested on 5 May. Syed Mahmud was arrested on 30 June for being Secretary of the ‘unlawful’ Working Committee, Sherwani was convicted in Bombay in connection with the “Tilak Day” procession on 2 August, Azad, acting President, was sent to gaol on 21 August, Khaliquzzaman served for a



while as Congress 'dictator' and Hasrat Mohani, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Khwaja and Brelvi were incarcerated more than once for defying government ordinances. The Congress Muslims everywhere were now in the forefront of a movement they had joined with extreme reluctance. The NMP conference in July, chaired by Ansari, supported mass action, such as general strike and movement of non-cooperation, especially because all resources to protest by means of representation, Press, platform and public demonstration had been exhausted. Ansari chose the occasion to repudiate the charge that Muslims, particularly those connected with the NMP, were wary of joining civil disobedience, "We had to stop this misrepresentation of the community by parties and persons, who would exploit the Muslim community to serve ends that are neither Indian nor Indian Muslim. We had to give the direct lie to libellers so that future generations might not point their finger of scorn at the supposed indifference of Mussalmans in their country's hour of trial."<sup>20</sup>

Much of the drive behind this enthusiasm followed the crucial decision of the *Jamiyat-al-ulama*, arrived after much deliberation, to participate in Gandhi's movement of civil disobedience. If the *ulama* could do so, so ran the argument, the Congress Muslims had no reason to distance themselves. Furthermore, they could not risk being found in the company of the Ali Brothers and their credibility, as indeed their political survival, depended on their ability to retrace their steps and choose the one course which made them part of the national mainstream. With the *ulama* and the Congress Muslims of the NMP behind the Congress, Ansari's claim that large segments of the Muslim community backed civil disobedience carried weight.

The rigours of the hectic political life, combined with his stint in British jails, damaged Ansari's health. He went to Europe for treatment—in October 1932, August 1933 and May 1934—but his heart condition did not improve. He complained of hard work and heavy responsibilities. "I don't think I would last long at this rate," he wrote in December 1933.<sup>21</sup> He informed Jawaharlal around the same time that he was unable to stand the rigours of political life and apologized in advance for his inability to attend meetings and conferences.<sup>22</sup> But, then, a politician of his stature and reputation could not quit that easily. He was pressed into service just when he contemplated resigning from the Congress bodies. In fact Ansari's last major intervention in Indian politics—one which greatly enhanced his political prestige—was in the revival of the Swaraj Party. He returned to active politics and in the form which most suited him. He became the go-between, the man who tried to arrange compromise between the contending political parties.

### **The Making of the Swaraj Party**

The opportunity of playing a major political role was provided by the slackening of the civil disobedience movement and the feeling among Congress leaders outside jail that its momentum could not be maintained any longer. By mid-1933 there were open demands for revising the Congress strategy as civil disobedience had outlived its usefulness as a method and devising a practical plan to turn the energies of the nation into 'channels of fruitful activity'. Such views, when voiced at the Poona Conference on 12-14 July 1933, met with Gandhi's strong opposition. Yet, the Mahatma, with his unmatched political skill which he used to his advantage, agreed to a compromise on his own terms: civil disobedience would not



be unconditionally withdrawn but would take the form of individual civil disobedience. As Congress had been unable to communicate the essence of *satyagraha* to the masses it was now to be conveyed to them by the example of individuals acting in a true 'spirit of resistance'.

Ansari sensed the political mood in Congress circles on his return to India in early November. S. Satyamurti (1887-1943) founded a provincial Swarajya Party a month earlier to contest elections to the local boards and Legislatures and chalked out plans for holding a conference to launch a party at the all-India level. K.F. Nariman (1883-1948), a Working Committee member, declared his intentions of restoring the Congress 'from the wrong track to which... it was drifting'. But Satyamurti and Nariman did not tread warily and their initiatives were thwarted by Gandhi and the Congress. Nariman tried in vain to seek a referendum on revoking, modifying, or retaining the civil disobedience movement started in 1932.

Soon thereafter, Ansari and B.C. Roy (1882-1962) entered the scene to carry on Nariman's unfinished work. They met in Bombay in late December, conferred with Azad, Sarojini Naidu and K.M. Munshi (1887-1971), and then drafted a letter, after consultations with Gandhi, inviting forty prominent Congressmen to draw up a scheme to implement the constructive programme outlined in the Poona Conference and later amplified in Gandhi's statement. Plans were then set afoot to convene a meeting in March. Ansari hoped that it would lead to the revival of the Swaraj Party and the formulation of a political programme. He had an excellent reason to entertain such a desire. Opposed to civil disobedience even in 1930, he wanted a change realising that Muslim seats in the Legislatures would all go to the communalists unless Congress could rehabilitate itself in its co-religionists'

eyes. Besides, with the communal situation deteriorating steadily and civil disobedience proceeding haltingly, he and his NMP colleagues felt demoralized and searched for a way out of the growing impasse. Jawaharlal learnt of the the 'demoralization outside' which had afflicted Ansari, Sherwani and Khaliquzzaman, though he was surprised and a bit disheartened that Rafi Ahmad Kidwai was also part of the same flock.

The initial move to hold a conference ran into trouble, but Roy's meeting with Gandhi on 17 March straightened matters. The latter informed Ansari the next day that he would not stand in the way of a Council entry party because of his belief that the paralysis of the intelligentsia had to be removed. He would, therefore, welcome a party of Congressmen prosecuting the programme rather than remaining sullen, discontented and inactive.

The conference that followed Gandhi's signal was held at *Dar-us-Salam*, with Ansari as the star performer. Many of those present already belonged to provincial parties that had formed themselves on the ruin of the Congress Party machine and had taken Council entry as their avowed or tacit objective. "For God sake," he implored, "end this deadly political paralysis that is slowly creeping on the nation and has resulted in a political lethargy and blankness that may ultimately lead to disaster." "Believe me," he assured his detractors, "I am still as staunch a Non-changer as before and I have been compelled to adopt this course as the only possible alternative to end the present deadlock." He gave assurance of Gandhi's support and spoke effectively and convincingly; in fact, an hour's forceful oration gave the final touch to the proceedings and made a unanimous decision on the revival of the Swaraj Party possible. Two days earlier, Ansari had gathered that



government intended to hold Assembly elections in autumn. He seized on this 'God-sent opportunity' as a handle for a new programme which would enable a challenge to government but would side-step the thorny question of withdrawing civil disobedience and making an immediate decision on the new Legislatures.<sup>23</sup> He put his argument to Brelvi, who, having condemned the Council entry policy as divisive in November 1933,<sup>24</sup> now extended his cooperation to Ansari's endeavours:

I know that you would stand by me realizing fully well that what I have done is entirely conceived in the interest of the country and solely with a view to remove the paralysis and death-like inertia... as a result of complete inactivity on the part of Congress workers... I admit that the scheme has many drawbacks and is far from perfect, but I want you to see what other schemes would have been devised which would be dynamic, would catch the imagination of the people, would offer a challenge to the Government and would at the same time be fighting the government on constitutional lines... You would also see that, as it confines itself to the election of the Assembly, it would be possible for the Swarajya Party to send the most outstanding men to contest the elections and thus ensure not only their return but the raising of the opposition in the Assembly and all Congressmen in the country.... The Swarajya Party after its campaign for the Assembly elections would have reached the electorate and familiarized the people to its aims and ideals and, therefore, it would be in a position to stand up in opposition to the forces of bureaucracy, of reaction, of capital and of communal organizations, which you

may rest assured would all combine against the Congressmen.

Ansari concluded on a cautious note, making it clear that he had no delusions regarding the limited scope of the Assembly work. But in the existing state of 'deadlock and paralysis' there was no alternative to the plans chalked out at the Delhi gathering.<sup>25</sup>

Ansari's optimism, reflected in his Delhi speech, was not misplaced. When he and Roy met Gandhi at Patna in early April they had no difficulty in convincing him that the Swaraj Party's revival was a political necessity and that many Congressmen were reticent to go to jail in pursuance of individual civil disobedience. Gandhi agreed and pledged his support to the revival of the party. He, then, suspended civil disobedience, a decision which agonized, among others, Jawaharlal. Gandhi's statement of 7 April withdrawing civil disobedience, the reasons given and the general outlook displayed seemed to Jawaharlal an insult to the nation and to the Congress. He felt with a stab of pain that the chords of allegiance that had bound him to the Mahatma for many years had snapped.<sup>26</sup> The Congress Socialist Party, inaugurated at Patna on 17 May 1934, was no less indignant. Abandonment of civil disobedience and the decision to enter the Delhi Assembly was a clear violation of the 1929 Lahore resolution which had called for boycotting Legislatures and had demanded nothing less than complete independence. The new policy, pursued under Gandhi's leadership, was further proof that the national movement was drifting inevitably towards constitutionalism and accommodation with the British. Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1979), writing in 1936, in *Why Socialism*, characterized Gandhism as a mixture of 'timid



economic analysis, good intentions and ineffective moralizing'. To socialists like him Gandhi was a 'reformist', who offered only palliatives for India's chronic and grievous social ills, when a purgative was required.<sup>27</sup> Such criticism was of limited value, for neither Jawaharlal nor his socialist followers could influence Gandhi's decision or desert the Congress ranks. Acharya Narendra Dev (1889-1956) summed up his party's strategy succinctly: 'Howsoever one may criticize and denounce the Congress, it is the only broad platform of anti-imperialist struggle in India and it is the only centre today from which such a struggle can be conducted.'<sup>28</sup>

The *Swarajists* were unmoved by the criticism. Amidst scenes of enthusiasm, nearly a hundred of them met in Ranchi on 2 May to implement the Delhi Conference decisions. Being unanimously voted to the chair, Ansari again occupied the centre stage. He detailed the history of the efforts which went into the making of the Swaraj Party and concluded with the plea to accept Gandhi's definition of *satyagraha* and civil resistance and to abide by his advice. At the AICC meeting on 18-19 May, he placed the *Swarajist* view, moved the all important resolution for suspending civil disobedience and shrugged socialist opposition by pointing out that most of their demands were contained in the Karachi Congress National Demand. "We have achieved in six weeks," he proudly announced, "what the most sanguine amongst us could not have expected in six months or a year and we have achieved what to us is the most priceless of all the assets: the recognition, the moral and political support of the greatest Indian National Organization, the Indian National Congress."<sup>29</sup>

The wheel had taken full circle. The 'no-changer' of 1922-23 was now a vocal champion of the council entry programme. Though ridiculed by some for executing a *volte face*, Ansari

brushed aside criticism with disdain. He enjoyed being at the centre of a controversy and heard with pleasure the words of praise showered on his dynamic leadership. He had not received such compliments before and relished them in his final hour of glory. His role in reviving the Swaraj Party was widely commended and he received credit for that 'great and wonderful miracle'—the conversion of the author of non-cooperation 'into a silent blessing of parliamentary methods'.<sup>30</sup> Nariman, elected Mayor of Bombay in April 1935, commented that the Mahatma's assent was entirely due to Ansari's 'advocacy of such transparent sincerity and honesty'.<sup>31</sup> The praise did not end here. As President of the Congress Parliamentary Board, an honour he greatly valued, there were more kudos for the man who emerged as the chief election campaigner—issuing policy statements, settling factional feuds, raising funds and laying down guidelines for candidates. It was a position of prominence Ansari greatly welcomed. Such was the goodwill he earned that, on the eve of his departure for Europe on 24 May, he was specially feted in Bombay.<sup>32</sup> Both Gandhi and Jawaharlal kept him informed of political developments at home and solicited his advice. On his return to Bombay on 5 October, Patel eulogized his contribution at a massive public meeting held at the Chowpatty sands.<sup>33</sup> This was Ansari's hour of triumph as he gazed at the massive gathering which applauded at the mention of his name.

Ansari was drawn into the fray immediately after returning from Europe. He opened the Assembly election campaign on 6 October in Bombay.<sup>34</sup> This was followed by an assurance to the electorate that the Swaraj Party would press for self-determination and pursue its task of national reconstruction. "Every voter", stated the appeal, "must look upon himself as the custodian of the country's honour and of both collective



and personal interests and therefore he should not waste his vote on small or subsidiary issues or allow it to be exploited by candidates who are not supported by the most powerful party of the country.”<sup>35</sup>

The Congress did well in the Assembly elections, winning 44 of the 88 elected seats. Brelvi, for one, felt no surprise; “there is not the least doubt that during the last few years the Congress had a tremendous hold over the people.”<sup>36</sup> Rajendra Prasad attributed Congress’ success to the faith and confidence of the people who were impressed by the party’s record of sacrifice and service.<sup>37</sup> Later, he talked of the party’s hold on the masses and their respect ‘not for the individual but for the institutions’. He had earlier felt that the large gatherings at public meetings were due to Gandhi’s charismatic personality and did not necessarily represent interest in Congress or *Swaraj*. But he found the same kind of response in his tours throughout the country, indicating the depth of support for the Congress and its policies.<sup>38</sup>

What Rajendra Prasad ignored was the singularly important contribution of Ansari in organizing the election campaign with imagination, purposefulness and efficiency. He minimized friction within the Congress, sorted out the all important problems of raising funds and ensured, much to everybody’s satisfaction, its proper distribution. His personal contribution to the election expenses, raised through a private loan, was substantial and entailed quite a burden to pay it off; “the result had been that I have had to go on grinding day after day and month by month without taking any rest or holiday,” he wrote to B.C. Roy in October 1935.<sup>39</sup> But this was scarcely recognized, a fact which seemingly distressed Ansari. This would probably explain why some of his statements, issued soon after the Assembly elections, were muted and underlined

his disappointment.<sup>40</sup> What added to his irritation was the irresponsible criticism of his statement of 16 October: his critics charged that his views were calculated to bring down the dignity of the Congress.<sup>41</sup> B.C. Roy came to his defence,<sup>42</sup> but Ansari's feelings were not assuaged. In disgust, he contemplated resigning from the Congress Parliamentary Board.<sup>43</sup>

In early March 1935 Ansari dropped a bomb shell by deciding to quit public life 'under great compulsion of pressing personal and private necessity'. This was followed by his resignation from the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board, a move which caught many by surprise. Some thought that it was in consequence of his feuds with members of the Parliamentary Board, particularly Bhulabhai Desai and Malaviya who made his effective functioning difficult. Both Ansari and Desai contradicted such reports. The *Bombay Chronicle* found it necessary to print in bold letters that Ansari's retirement was due solely to reasons of health and speculation as to other possible reasons were without any foundation.<sup>44</sup>

Not many had reasons to rejoice at Ansari's decision. Gandhi, who cared for Ansari more than anybody outside his close and inner circle of friends and followers, insisted that he should not desert the Board or the Committee.<sup>45</sup> Others pleaded with him to give up the idea. Nariman was one of them. He wanted Ansari's association with the Parliamentary Board because he occupied 'a peculiar and unique position, both in Congress and the country. His unassailable nationalism and his uncompromising anti-communalism give a peculiar value to his association to all political organizations in general and to the Congress Parliamentary Board in particular. With him at the helm, none dare charge the Board with communa-



list tendencies... He is a strong link between the two great communities and his nationalism and cosmopolitanism serve as an inspiring example to young political India... and also as an effective check to the canker of communalism. To remove both this inspiration and check at a time when both are most needed would be a suicidal and retrograde step.

Nariman concluded by pointing out that 'a general has no right to retire till the fight is over and the rank and file can demand at least his association, if not active service, so long as the objective is not reached'.<sup>46</sup>

Unmoved by such earnest pleas Ansari quickly withdrew into the quiet surroundings of *Dar-us-Salam*. He was occasionally consulted, as in the case of electing the Congress President for the 1935 session, but was generally reticent to dabble in public affairs. "Now that I am free from all responsibilities for the future," he wrote to B.C. Roy, "I shall breathe freely and feel my own master, a luxury which I have not enjoyed all these years owing to my intimate connection with the Congress."<sup>47</sup> He had been engaged in writing his book on *Regeneration in Man* and was happy to see it through the press. Published in early 1935, this extremely readable work gave a historical retrospect and a review of the advances in the knowledge of the endocrinal activity of the sex glands. There were words of praise and appreciation from several quarters. Gandhi was among those who read it with great interest, though he refrained from offering any comments.

Ansari's main interest lay in nursing the Jamia Millia which has suffered years of neglect. His appeal for funds, issued in mid-February, met with a favourable response and funds came pouring in from different quarters. This enabled him to organize the foundation ceremony of a new building at a site in Okhla, now in South Delhi, where 100 acres of land was

acquired for Rs. 10,000. Performed by the youngest child in Jamia and amidst much pomp and show, the ceremony was witnessed by luminaries like Rajendra Prasad, Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Bhulabhai Desai and the Turkish guest, Halide Edib. The *Amir-i-Jamia* said on the occasion: "We desire to build an institution which, while being Islamic in its traditions, will be national in its outlook." His dreams were partially fulfilled, but he was not destined to be associated with Jamia's slow but steady progress for long. In April he entrusted the work for raising contributions for the Jamia building fund to Shafiqur Rahman Kidwai and Zakir Husain and thereafter did little beyond performing his minimal duties as *Amir-i-Jamia*.

So ended a distinguished public life which spanned over two decades and encompassed some of the most tumultuous years in India's fight for freedom. Some still hoped that he would be restored to his normal health and take his place 'in the political life of the country to which few living men have made a more disinterested, glorious and invaluable contribution'.<sup>48</sup> But such hopes did not come true. While returning from Mussoorie where he had gone to attend on the Nawab of Rampur, Ansari suffered a heart attack near Jainpur Saun station and died a little after 12.30 A.M. on 10 May 1936. "Few deaths leave me disconsolate as this has done," wrote Gandhi in his tribute to the man he admired and respected. "Quite wrongly, I know, but I had pictured Dr Ansari as one destined to finish his century. When, therefore, I got the Press wire, I could not believe at first. He had become part of the lives of many."<sup>49</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 To Gandhi, 10 February 1930, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 93. Also, Khaliqzaman to Jawaharlal, 1 February 1930, Ansari Papers, JMI.



2 Statement, 6 July 1930, *ibid.*, p. 115.

3 He compared the situation in the following manner:

(1920)	(1930)
a. Great dissatisfaction against the Govt. owing to wartime promises not having been kept. Dissatisfaction against Rowlatt Act, Martial Law and Khilafat wrongs.	a. Large number of people believe in the goodwill of the Labour Govt. and sincerity of the Viceroy, rightly or wrongly.
b. Highest watermark reached in Hindu-Muslim unity.	b. Lowest watermark reached in Hindu-Muslim unity.
c. Sikhs entirely with the Congress.	c. Sikhs almost entirely against the Congress.
d. Complete unity inside the Congress. Great enthusiasm among the workers and the rank and file.	d. Disunity in the Congress, diversity of purpose, complete lack of enthusiasm amongst the workers. Lukewarmness amongst the rank and file.
e. Complete non-violent atmosphere and yet breaking of violence in Chauri Chaura.	e. Obvious existence of violence, even large number of leading Congressmen believing in it and the certainty of violence breaking out.

Ansari to Gandhi, 13 February 1930, *ibid.*, pp. 99-100. This letter is also published in *CWMG*, Vol. XLII, pp. 518-22.

4 The first page of this letter is missing, but it was obviously written by Ansari to Gandhi soon after 3 March 1930. See Ansari Collection, NMML.

5 To Brelvi, 2 April 1930, Brelvi Papers.

6 Gandhi to Ansari, 16 February 1930, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 101-2; also, *CWMG*, Vol. XLII, pp. 510-11.

7 Motilal Nehru to Ansari, 17 February 1930, *ibid.*, pp. 103-4.

8 It seems to us that Gandhi has not so far tried so much as he ought to have done to bring about a Hindu-Muslim settlement... [and] has not yet made any sustained efforts to make the Hindus as a community to take up an attitude that may make for a settlement. *Mussalman*, 20 June 1931. This assertion was true to a certain extent but was not supported by the impression of other contemporaries. Sapru, for instance, found him anxious for a Hindu-Muslim settlement and felt, quite rightly, that it

was unfair to judge Gandhi's intentions by his public statements or by what some of his followers said. Earlier, Gandhi had written to Sapru that he was 'trying in my own way to reach a solution of the communal tangle. If there is no success I would not have the heart to go to London. I said as much to Irwin.' Sapru to Sankey, 24 May 1931, Gandhi to Spru 22 April 1931, Sapru Papers (23).

- 9 Ansari to Gandhi, n.d., Ansari Collection, NMML. It is noteworthy that Ansari did not change his view until 1934 when he again complained of Gandhi not doing enough to restore communal amity. Gandhi wrote in reply: 'If you entertain this fear I would like to disabuse you of the fear. My views are just as strong as they were on the necessity of this unity. But I have come to the conclusion that this is the time for real lovers of unity to sit still and simply pray showing in their individual action what a living unity of hearts can mean. Do you not meet in your practice with boils which grow worse with teasing? I find communal discord such a boil, the more you tease it the worse it becomes. It needs a rest cure.' Gandhi to Ansari, 18 March 1934, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 145.
- 10 *Mussalman*, 10 March, 4 July 1931.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 4 April 1931.
- 12 Gandhi to Ansari, 3 March 1930, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 118.
- 13 This was the essence of Gandhi's letter of 16 February to Ansari.
- 14 Ansari to Gandhi, n.d., Ansari Collection, NMML.
- 15 Syed Mahmud to Ansari, n.d., Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, pp. 106-7.
- 16 Sherwani to Ansari, 3 March 1930, *ibid.*, p. 113.
- 17 Khaliquzzaman to Ansari, 1 March 1930, *ibid.*, pp. 110-11.
- 18 Ansari to Sherwani, 6 January 1930, *ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
- 19 He put it somewhat differently in his letter to Gandhi. 'My heart,' he wrote, 'is with you but my brain is not, in spite of all the bias in your favour.' To Gandhi, n.d., Ansari Collection, NMML. Also, Ansari to V.J. Patel, 29 May 1930, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 123.
- 20 *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 July 1930.
- 21 To Shaukatullah Ansari, 9 December 1933, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 141. He had earlier written to Jawaharlal to say that there was an acceptable improvement in his heart condition. A week before sailing for India he wrote from France: 'A week in London was enough to make me run away from there. I am here for this week before taking my boat on 26th. One at least sees the sun here.' To Jawaharlal,



19 October 1933, Nehru Papers (3).

22 To Jawaharlal, 20 December 1933, Nehru Papers (3); Ansari to A.L. Bijnori, 19 October 1934, Bijnori, *Latif Ki Kahani*, pp. 280-1. Horace Alexander met Ansari at London in 1933 and remembered how his health had been broken by his imprisonment, and 'he had become an old man'. Nehru Papers (3).

23 Ansari to Brelvi, 10 April 1934, Brelvi Papers; Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 364.

24 Brelvi to Satyamurti, 12 November 1933, quoted in Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 364.

25 Ansari to Brelvi, 10 April 1934, Brelvi Papers.

26 *SWJ*, Vol. 6, p. 272; Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. I, pp. 186-7; Pandey, *Nehru*, pp. 178-9.

27 For a recent study, see Bimal Prasad, *Gandhi, Nehru and J.P.: Studies in Leadership* (Delhi, 1985).

28 *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 May 1934.

29 *Ibid.*, 25 May 1935 (editorial comment).

30 *Ibid.*, 11 April 1935, and editorial comment, 6 April 1935.

31 *Ibid.*, 7 October 1934.

32 *Ibid.*, 25 May 1934.

33 *Ibid.*, 6 October 1934.

34 *Ibid.*, 7 October 1934.

35 Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, pp. 165-7.

36 Brelvi to Ansari, 24 November 1934, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 192.

37 Rajendra Prasad to Ansari, 26 December 1934, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 227.

38 Rajendra Prasad to Sri Prakasa, 11 December 1935, Sri Prakasa Papers, NMML.

39 Ansari to B.C. Roy, 10 October 1935, Roy Papers.

40 Statement of 26 November 1934 and letter to Congress members of the Legislative Assembly, 11 December 1934, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, pp. 196-7, 213-4.

41 *Bombay Chronicle*, 7 January 1935.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Ansari to G.B. Pant, October 1934 (telegram), Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 167.

44 *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 April 1935.

45 'I hope you will not desert the Board or the Committee. You need not take any great active part requiring much strain. But your counsel cannot be dispensed with'. Gandhi to Ansari, 16 February 1935, *CWMG*, Vol.

LX, p. 237. Later, of course, Gandhi acceded to Ansari's request. 'I shall not strive with you but plead with Rajenbabu to release you,' he wrote. To Ansari, 8 March 1935, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 253, and *CWMG*, Vol. LX, p. 285.

- 46 *Bombay Chronicle*, 12 April 1935. Also, editorial comment of 6 April 1935.
- 47 Ansari to B.C. Roy, 6 October 1935, Roy Papers.
- 48 *Bombay Chronicle*, 6 April 1935.
- 49 To Zakir Husain, 12 May 1936, Ansari Papers (Miscellaneous files), JMI.



## The Legacy

ANSARI was buried in Jamia. The funeral was intended to be private, but the immense popular interest turned it into a public, even a national event. In areas where his name was so firmly associated with the freedom struggle and the cause of communal unity, there was spontaneous expression of grief at his premature death. *Dar-us-Salam*, a familiar landmark in Delhi's political history, was thronged with mourners. Public meetings were held in the capital where, for nearly a quarter of a century, Ansari survived the kicks and buffetings of political life and came to symbolize the composite cultural ethos of the Indo-Gangetic region. He had given a tone to public life that promoted good-will and had smoothed away the harsher discords of politics. Elsewhere he was remembered as a Congress stalwart, a freedom fighter and an apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity. Wrote the *Bombay Chronicle*: "While the spectre of communalism stalked the land and many a nationalist even among the Congressmen fell victim to it, Dr Ansari remained unshaken in his faith in democratic nationalism..... His nationalism was pure, unadulterated and undefiled."<sup>1</sup>

Ansari was with his gentle manner a most attractive person, with an endearing streak of sometimes childlike simplicity. Kindness came naturally to him and he was thoughtful and considerate even to those who were not his personal friends or political comrades. Those to whom he was personally attached always found him ready to involve himself sympathetically in

their affairs. His Congress comrades held him in esteem for his devotion to nationalist causes, his humanity, generosity and kindness.<sup>2</sup> Gandhi and the Nehrus treated him with respect and deference. He was their friend and confidant and, after Mohamed Ali's estrangement from the Congress, the most important front rank leader they could rely on for rallying the Muslims around the Congress banner. From 1924-25 to 1935 he occupied the same position in Congress that Azad enjoyed in the 1940s. During this period, he was a man of action in the best sense: what he had learnt from his practical experience he used to exhort, advise and implore. He led a life of almost ceaseless endeavour and commitment, sustained by a vision of an independent India free from communal antagonism and proved himself in the most searching of political tests.

Outside the Congress circles he got on well with the Liberals. He was not in sympathy with their political creed and was impatient with their limited political objectives. But he had much in common with Sapru whom he had known since 1915 and often acted in unison to bridge the Hindu-Muslim divide. He invited the Liberal leader to preside over the lecture of Husain Rauf Bey, first President of the Ankara National Assembly, at the Jamia Millia Islamia,<sup>3</sup> backed his move to resolve the communal deadlock<sup>4</sup> and appreciated his firm advocacy of India's constitutional rights. "Although it has not been possible for Congressmen during the last 14 or 15 years to see eye to eye," Ansari told Sapru, "there have been more occasions than one when your cooperation on critical junctures such as, for instance, the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations, has proved of considerable value."<sup>5</sup> Sapru, in turn, endorsed Ansari's stand on major political issues, especially on civil disobedience, the Communal Award and the revival of the Swaraj Party, and admired his 'genuine type of nationalism'.<sup>6</sup>



In his final tribute to Ansari, he wrote:

for whom I had greater respect and for whom personally, if I may say so, greater affection. In these days, when it is a fashion for so many to claim to be nationalists, there was no man among the Hindus or the Muslims to whose real feelings of nationalism I felt more drawn than those of Ansari. Whatever else he may or may not have been, he was, in my humble opinion, *a very true, a very selfless and a very earnest nationalist* [emphasis added]. We have lost in him not only a great patriot, a great nationalist, a great doctor, but what is more, a great gentleman.<sup>7</sup>

Of all his friendships, perhaps that with Hakim Ajmal Khan had been the closest; in fact rarely in Muslim political affairs had such a partnership persisted, so intimate and so loyal. But the Hakim died in 1927 and thereafter Ansari was increasingly dependent on Sherwani,<sup>8</sup> Khaliquzzaman, Abdul Majid Khwaja, Abdur Rahman Siddiqi and Shuaib Qureshi. Some like Azad, Syed Mahmud, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Ghaffar Khan, Mujibur Rahman, Brelvi, Kitchlew and Hasrat Mohani sympathized with him on certain issues; but none could remotely be described as belonging to his personal following. His protege, Khaliquzzaman, also did not act closely with him. For much of the period after 1929-30, indeed, he was on the other side searching for a role outside the Congress. He exuded insincerity to some and seemed at times to embody the popular image of a cynical politician. In fact Ansari complained of Khaliquzzaman's cold and indifferent treatment. He was pained to discover that he had stood for the Assembly elections and had not bothered to inform him about it. "But I

must not forget my place. Who am I to grumble, what am I to take offence to such things?"<sup>9</sup>

What Ansari could not prophesy was that his political legacy would be carried forth and made into an integral part of the nationalist movement. Admittedly, he was not as influential as Mohamed Ali was in the years 1918 to 1922; in comparison, he was also lacking in charisma, personal dynamism and popular appeal. But what inspired an entire generation of young Muslims was his consistent defiance of colonial rule, his unassailable loyalty to the Congress movement and its ideals, his contribution to fostering communal amity and harmony and his attractive personality which was free from rancour and bitterness and untouched by any personal or political scandal. Many Muslims who gathered around Jawaharlal in the 1930s were friends and followers of Ansari, a fact which has gone unnoticed in most historical accounts. Many who organized the Muslim Mass Contact Campaign, launched in March 1937, had learnt their political lessons at the feet of Ansari. And many who assembled in Delhi at the Azad Muslim Conference in April 1940 were members of the All-India Nationalist Muslim Party, an organization founded by Ansari in July 1929. Equally, various isolated, though ineffectual, endeavours in the 1940s to stem the Muslim League tide were inspired by the example of Ansari.

Ansari's political message was simple and straightforward. The destiny of the Indian Muslims was inextricably linked with their fellow countrymen with whom they had everything in common except religion. The Congress, according to him, was engaged in a historic struggle against a colonial power and it was, therefore, incumbent upon all sections of the society to rally round such an organization. The debate



whether a Muslim was loyal to the country first or to his faith was a sterile one and had no relevance, for Islam and nationalism were compatible in the Indian, as indeed in any other situation. Indian nationalism represented the true and genuine aspirations of the Indian people generally; so the Hindus and the Muslims, who shared common historical experiences and a common destiny, must endeavour to forge a united front in the attainment of independence and harness their energies in the creation of a secular and democratic polity. Existing differences between them, created and fostered by the British, could be amicably settled through pacts, agreements and unity conferences. To Congress offered, so Ansari argued, an adequate and appropriate framework for the resolution of communal disputes.

Some of these formulations were fairly simplistic, for Ansari took no account of the larger historical processes created largely by a complex interplay of socio-economic forces, which engendered communal conflicts. That is why he exaggerated the ease with which unity could be achieved and assumed, somewhat naively, that unity conferences and frequent negotiations between leaders would put an end to communal discord. When these failed, he complained that Gandhi and Motilal had not shown sufficient interest in the matter. He was right in his perception, but he was wrong in assuming that their influence was so pervasive that any agreement on the communal issue could be pushed through without taking care of the interests, fears and aspirations of their other constituent groups. Moreover, Ansari could not fully discern a shift in the order of priorities. The resolution of communal differences was no doubt a vital part of the Congress programme in the early 1930, but it was conveniently deferred until the attainment of *Swaraj*. This was as

much an admission of failure as a tactical move to divert the attention of the people to the anti-colonial struggle, launched in the form of civil disobedience. Ansari was unable to come to terms with this reality; hence his outburst in February-March 1930, when he distanced himself from the civil disobedience movement. His resignation from the Congress bodies in early 1930 was a step reluctantly taken. It was feared that he might become the leader of a revolt, but he made no such attempt and resisted the considerable pressure placed upon him to align himself with the Muslim League. In the months that followed his resignation he spoke rarely in public or Congress meetings. When he did speak his main theme was the need for national unity and in developing his argument he did little to disturb the unity of the Congress Party. He remained loyal and, in so doing, won the respect of all sections of the Congress.

This was not all. Men with lesser convictions wavered in their loyalty and succumbed to communal pressures. But not Ansari. He sensed the drift in Congress policies but refused to change course. He realized that his own efforts to bring about an overall communal agreement had come to nothing. Yet he did not despair. He persisted in his search for a consensus, continued to champion Hindu-Muslim unity and, in the end, represented the best traditions of Indian nationalism. "We are not likely to see the like of Dr Ansari again," concluded Mahadev Desai in his tribute.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 May 1936.
2. Gandhi wrote that Ansari 'can't refuse anybody, rich or poor. He was once visited by a woman out to rob him, and he emptied his purse into the fold of her sari'. Gandhi to V.J. Patel, 8 April 1935, CWMG, Vol. LX, p. 400.



3. To Sapru, 26 February 1933, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 135.
4. To Sapru, 25 March 1933, *ibid.*, p. 137.
5. To Sapru, 28 April 1934, *ibid.*, p. 152.
6. Sapru to Ansari, 23 April 1934, *ibid.*, pp. 147-50.
7. Sapru to Asaf Ali, 12 May 1936, Sapru Papers.
8. He died on 22 March 1932. Wrote Jawaharlal in his prison diary: "We had been arrested together on Dec. 26, 1931, and had spent a month together in barrack No. 6. That month and the preceding months during the strenuous tour period we had a great deal to do with each other and my liking for him had progressively grown. When he went to Europe with Ansari in the summer of 1934 for treatment he wrote to me to prison almost an apologetic letter for leaving the country at that juncture. A brave man, true man, rather limited in outlook as all of us are, but not to be frightened or bullied." 24 March 1935, *SWJ*, Vol. 6, p. 337.
9. Ansari to Khaliquzzaman, 24 February 1923, Hasan (ed.), *Muslims and the Congress*, p. 107.
10. Mahadev Desai to Birla, 12 May 1936, *Bapu*, Vol. 2, p. 235.





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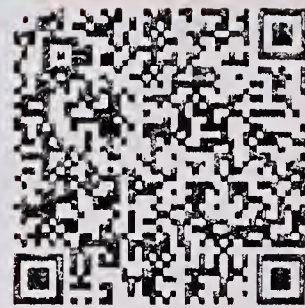








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